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A
Romance of Two Worlds.

A Novel.

BY
MARIE CORELLI.

IN TWO VOLUMES. 2.
VOL. II.



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A

ROMANCE OF TWO WORLDS.



CHAPTER I.

MY STRANGE DEPARTURE.

THE next morning brought me two letters; one from Mrs. Everard, telling me that she and the Colonel had resolved on coming to Paris.

“All the nice people are going away from here,” she wrote. “Madame Didier and her husband have started for Naples; and, to crown our lonesomeness, Raffaello Cellini packed up all his traps, and left us

yesterday morning *en route* for Rome. The weather continues to be delicious; but as you seem to be getting on so well in Paris, in spite of the cold there, we have made up our minds to join you, the more especially as I want to renovate my wardrobe. We shall go straight to the Grand Hotel; and I am writing to Mrs. Challoner by this post, asking her to get us rooms. We are so glad you are feeling nearly recovered—of course, you must not leave your physician till you are quite ready. At any rate, we shall not arrive till the end of next week.”

I began to calculate. During that strange interview in the chapel, Heliobas had said that in eight days more I should be strong enough to undergo the transmigration he had promised to effect upon me. Those eight days were now completed on this very morning. I was glad of this; for I did not care to see Mrs. Everard or anyone till the experiment

was over. The other letter I received was from Mrs. Challoner, who asked me to give an "Improvisation" at the Grand Hotel that day fortnight.

When I went down to breakfast, I mentioned both these letters, and said, addressing myself to Heliobas :

"Is it not rather a sudden freak of Raffaello Cellini's to leave Cannes? We all thought he was settled for the winter there. Did you know he was going to Rome?"

"Yes," replied Heliobas, as he stirred his coffee abstractedly. "I knew he was going there some day this month; his presence is required there on business."

"And are you going to give the Improvisation this Mrs. Challoner asks you for?" inquired Zara.

I glanced at Heliobas. He answered for me.

"I should certainly give it if I were you," he said quietly: "there will be

nothing to prevent your doing so at the date named."

I was relieved. I had not been altogether able to divest myself of the idea that I might possibly never come out alive from the electric trance to which I had certainly consented; and this assurance on the part of Heliobas was undoubtedly comforting. We were all very silent that morning; we all wore grave and preoccupied expressions. Zara was very pale, and appeared lost in thought. Heliobas, too, looked slightly careworn, as though he had been up all night, engaged in some brain-exhausting labour. No mention was made of Prince Ivan; we avoided his name by a sort of secret mutual understanding. When the breakfast was over, I looked with a fearless smile at the calm face of Heliobas, which appeared nobler and more dignified than ever with that slight touch of sadness upon it, and said softly :

“The eight days are accomplished.”

He met my gaze fully, with a steady and serious observation of my features, and replied :

“My child, I am aware of it. I expect you in my private room at noon. In the meantime speak to no one—not even to Zara ; read no books ; touch no note of music. The chapel has been prepared for you ; go there and pray. When you see a small point of light touch the extreme edge of the cross upon the altar, it will be twelve o'clock, and you will then come to me.”

With these words, uttered in a grave and earnest tone, he left me. A sensation of sudden awe stole upon me. I looked at Zara. She laid her finger on her lips and smiled, enjoining silence ; then drawing my hand close within her own, she led me to the door of the chapel. There she took a soft veil of some white transparent fabric, and flung it over me, embracing and kissing me

tenderly as she did so, but uttering no word. Taking my hand again, she entered the chapel with me, and accompanied me through what seemed a blaze of light and colour to the high altar, before which was placed a *prie-dieu* of crimson velvet. Motioning me to kneel, she kissed me once more through the filmy veil that covered me from head to foot ; then turning noiselessly away she disappeared, and I heard the heavy oaken door close behind her. Left alone, I was able to quietly take note of everything around me. The altar before which I knelt was ablaze with lighted candles, and a wealth of the purest white flowers decorated it, mingling their delicious fragrance with the faintly perceptible odour of incense. On all sides of the chapel, in every little niche, and at every shrine, tapers were burning like fireflies in a summer twilight. At the foot of the large crucifix, which occupied a somewhat shadowy corner, lay a wreath of magnificent

crimson roses. It would seem as though some high festival were about to be celebrated, and I gazed around me with a beating heart, half expecting some invisible touch to awaken the notes of the organ and a chorus of spirit-voices to respond with the "Gloria in excelsis Deo!" But there was silence — absolute, beautiful, restful silence. I strove to collect my thoughts, and turning my eyes towards the jewelled cross that surmounted the high altar, I clasped my hands, and began to wonder how and for what I should pray. Suddenly the idea struck me that surely it was selfish to ask Heaven for anything; would it not be better to reflect on all that had already been given to me, and to offer up thanks? Scarcely had this thought entered my mind when a sort of overwhelming sense of unworthiness came over me. Had I ever been unhappy? I wondered. If so, why? I began to count up my blessings and compare them with my

misfortunes. Exhausted pleasure-seekers may be surprised to hear that I proved the joys of my life to have far exceeded my sorrows. I found that I had sight, hearing, youth, sound limbs, an appreciation of the beautiful in art and nature, and an intense power of enjoyment. For all these things, impossible of purchase by mere wealth, should I not give thanks? For every golden ray of sunshine, for every flower that blooms, for the harmonies of the wind and sea, for the singing of birds and the shadows of trees, should I not—should we not all give thanks? For is there any human sorrow so great that the blessing of mere daylight on the earth does not far exceed? We mortals are spoilt and petted children—the more gifts we have the more we crave; and when we burn or wound ourselves by our own obstinacy or carelessness, we are ungratefully prone to blame the Supreme Benefactor for our own faults. We don black

mourning robes as a sort of sombre protest against Him for having removed some special object of our choice and love, whereas, if we believed in Him and were grateful to Him, we should wear dazzling white in sign of rejoicing that our treasure is safe in the land of perfect joy where we ourselves desire to be. Do we suffer from illness, loss of money, position, or friends, we rail against Fate—another name for God—and complain like babes who have broken their toys; yet the sun shines on, the seasons come and go, the lovely panorama of Nature unrolls itself all for our benefit, while we murmur and fret and turn our eyes away in anger.

Thinking of these things and kneeling before the altar, my heart became filled with gratitude; and no petition suggested itself to me save one, and that was, "Let me believe and love!" I thought of the fair, strong, stately figure of Christ, standing out in the world's history, like a

statue of pure white marble against a dark background ; I mused on the endurance, patience, forgiveness, and perfect innocence of that most spotless life which was finished on the cross, and again I murmured, " Let me believe and love ! " And I became so absorbed in meditation that the time fled fast, till a sudden sparkle of flame flashing across the altar-steps caused me to look up. The jewelled cross had become a cross of fire. The point of light I had been told to watch for had not only touched the extreme edge, but had crept down among all the precious stones and lit them up like stars. I afterwards learned that this effect was produced by means of a thin electric wire, which, communicating with a timepiece constructed on the same system, illuminated the cross at sunrise, noon, and sunset. It was time for me to join Heliobas. I rose gently, and left the chapel with a quiet and reverent step, for I have always thought

that to manifest hurry and impatience in any place set apart for the worship of the Creator is to prove yourself one of the unworthiest things created. Once outside the door I laid aside my veil, and then, with a perfectly composed and fearless mind, went straight to the Electrician's study. I shall never forget the intense quiet of the house that morning. The very fountain in the hall seemed to splash in a sort of subdued whisper. I found Heliobas seated at his table, reading. How my dream came vividly back to me, as I saw him in that attitude! I felt that I knew what he was reading. He looked up as I entered, and greeted me with a kindly yet grave smile. I broke silence abruptly.

"Your book is open," I said, "at a passage commencing thus: 'The universe is upheld solely by the Law of Love. A majestic, invisible Protectorate governs the winds, the tides.' Is it not so?"

“It is so,” returned Heliobas. “Are you acquainted with the book?”

“Only through the dream I had of you at Cannes,” I answered. “I do think Signor Cellini had some power over me.”

“Of course he had in your then weak state. But now you are as strong as he is, he could not influence you at all. Let us be brief in our converse, my child. I have a few serious things to say to you before you leave me, on your celestial journey.”

I trembled slightly, but took the chair he pointed out to me—a large easy-chair in which one could almost recline and sleep.

“Listen,” continued Heliobas: “I told you, when you first came here, that whatever I might do to restore you to health, you would have it in your power to repay me amply. You *are* restored to health; will you give me my reward?”

“I would and will do anything to prove

my gratitude to you," I said earnestly. "Only tell me how."

"You are aware," he went on, "of my theories respecting the Electric Spirit or Soul in Man. It is progressive, as I have told you—it begins as a germ—it goes on increasing in power and beauty for ever, till it is great and pure enough to enter the last of all worlds—God's world. But there are sometimes hindrances to its progression—obstacles in its path, which cause it to recoil and retire a long way back—so far back occasionally that it has to commence its journey over again. Now, by my earnest researches, I am able to study and watch the progress of my own inner force or soul. So far, all has been well—prayerfully and humbly I may say I believe all has been well. But I foresee an approaching shadow—a difficulty—a danger—which, if it cannot be repelled or passed in some way, threatens to violently push back my advanc-

ing spiritual nature, so that, with much grief and pain, I shall have to re-commence the work that I had hoped was done. *I* cannot, with all my best effort, discover *what* this darkening obstacle is—but *you*, yes, *you*”—for I had started up in surprise —“you, when you are lifted up high enough to behold these things, may, being perfectly unselfish in this research, attain to the knowledge of it and explain it to me, when you return. In trying to probe the secret for myself, it is of course purely for my own interest; and nothing clear, nothing satisfactory can be spiritually obtained, in which selfishness has ever so slight a share. You, if indeed I deserve your gratitude for the aid I have given you—you will be able to search out the matter more certainly, being in the position of one soul working for another. Still, I cannot compel you to do this for me—I only ask, *will* you?”

His entreating and anxious tone touched

me keenly ; but I was amazed and perplexed, and could not yet realize what strange thing was going to happen to me. But whatever occurred I was resolved to give a ready consent to his request, therefore I said firmly :

“I will do my best, I promise you. Remember that I do not know, I cannot even guess where I am going, or what strange sensations will overcome me ; but if I am permitted to have any recollection of earth at all, I will try to find out what you ask.”

Heliobas seemed satisfied, and rising from his chair, unlocked a heavily bound iron safe. From this he took a glass flask of a strange, ever-moving, glittering fluid, the same in appearance as that which Raffaello Cellini had forbidden me to drink. He then paused and looked searchingly at me.

“Tell me,” he said in an authoritative tone, “tell me *why* you wish to see what

to mortals is unseen? What motive have you? What ulterior plan?"

I hesitated. Then I gathered my strength together and answered decisively:

"I desire to know why this world, this universe exists; and I also wish to prove, if possible, the truth and necessity of religion. And I think I would give my life, if it were worth anything, to be certain of the truth of Christianity."

Heliobas gazed in my face with a sort of half-pity, half-censure.

"You have a daring aim," he said slowly, "and you are a bold seeker. But shame, repentance and sorrow await you where you are going, as well as rapture and amazement. '*I would give my life, if it were worth anything.*' That utterance has saved you—otherwise to soar into an unexplored wilderness of spheres, weighted by your own doubts and guided solely by your own wild desires, would be a fruitless journey."

I felt abashed as I met his steady scrutinizing eyes.

“Surely it is well to wish to know the reason of things?” I asked, with some timidity.

“The desire of knowledge is a great virtue, certainly,” he replied; “it is not truly felt by one in a thousand. Most persons are content to live and die, absorbed in their own petty commonplace affairs, without troubling themselves as to the reasons of their existence. Yet it is almost better, like these, to wallow in blind ignorance than wantonly to doubt the Creator because He is unseen, or to put a self-opiniated construction on His mysteries because He chooses to veil them from our eyes.”

“I do not doubt!” I exclaimed earnestly, “I only want to make sure, and then perhaps I may persuade others.”

“You can never compel faith,” said Heliobas calmly. “You are going to see

wonderful things that no tongue or pen can adequately describe. Well, when you return to earth again, do you suppose you can make people believe the story of your experiences? Never! Be thankful if you are the possessor of a secret joy yourself, and do not attempt to impart it to others who will only repel and mock you."

"Not even to one other?" I asked hesitatingly.

A warm kindly smile seemed to illuminate his face, as I put this question.

"Yes, to one other—the other half of yourself—you may tell all things," he said. "But now, no more converse. If you are quite ready, drink this."

He held out to me a small tumbler filled with the sparkling volatile liquid he had poured from the flask. For one moment my courage almost forsook me, and an icy shiver ran through my veins. Then I bethought myself of all my boasted

bravery; was it possible that I should fail now at this critical moment? I allowed myself no more time for reflection, but took the glass from his hand and drained its contents to the last drop. It was tasteless, but sparkling and warm on the tongue. Scarcely had I swallowed it, when a curiously light, dizzy sensation overcame me, and the figure of Heliobas standing before me seemed to assume gigantic proportions. I saw his hands extend — his eyes, like lamps of electric flame, burned through and through me — and like a distant echo, I heard the deep vibrating tones of his voice uttering the following words :

“Azùl! Azùl! Lift up this light and daring spirit unto thyself; be its pioneer upon the path it must pursue; suffer it to float untrammelled through the wide and glorious Continents of Air; give it form and force to alight on any of the vast and beautiful spheres it may desire to

behold; and if worthy, permit it to gaze, if only for a brief interval, upon the supreme vision of the First and Last of worlds. By the force thou givest unto me, I free this soul; do thou, Azùl, quickly receive it!"

A dense darkness now grew thickly around me—I lost all power over my limbs—I felt myself being lifted up forcibly and rapidly, up, up, into some illimitable, terrible space of blackness and nothingness. I could not think, move, or cry out—I could only feel that I was rising, rising, steadily, swiftly, breathlessly . . . when suddenly a long quivering flash of radiance, like the fragment of a rainbow, struck dazzlingly across my sight. Darkness? What had I to do with darkness? I knew not the word—I was only conscious of light—light exquisitely pure and brilliant—light through which I stepped as easily as a bird flies in air. Perfectly awake to my sensations, I felt somehow

that there was nothing remarkable in them—I seemed to be at home in some familiar element. Delicate hands held mine—a face far lovelier than the loveliest face of woman ever dreamed by poet or painter, smiled radiantly at me, and I smiled back again. A voice whispered in strange musical murmurs, such as I well seemed to know and comprehend :

“Gaze behind thee ere the picture fades.”

I obeyed, half reluctantly, and saw as a passing shadow in a glass, or a sort of blurred miniature painting, the room where Heliobas stood, watching some strange imperfect shape, which I seemed faintly to recognise. It looked like a small cast in clay, very badly executed, of the shape I at present wore ; but it was incomplete, as though the sculptor had given it up as a failure and gone away, leaving it unfinished.

“Did I dwell in that body ?” I mused

to myself, as I felt the perfection of my then state of being. "How came I shut in such a prison? How poor a form—how destitute of faculties—how full of infirmities—how limited in capabilities—how narrow in all intelligence—how ignorant—how mean!"

And I turned for relief to the shining companion who held me, and obeying an impulse suddenly imparted, I felt myself floating higher and higher till the last limits of the atmosphere surrounding the Earth were passed, and fields of pure and cloudless ether extended before us. Here we met myriads of creatures like ourselves, all hastening in various directions—all lovely and radiant as a dream of the fairies. Some of these beings were quite tiny and delicate—some of lofty stature and glorious appearance: their forms were human, yet so refined, improved, and perfected, that they were unlike, while so like humanity.

“Askest thou nothing?” whispered the voice beside me.

“Tell me,” I answered, “what I must know.”

“These spirits that we behold,” went on the voice, “are the guardians of all the inhabitants of all the planets. Their labours are those of love and penitence. Their work is to draw other souls to God—to attract them by warnings, by pleading, by praying. They have all worn the garb of mortality themselves, and they teach mortals by their own experience. For these radiant creatures are expiating sins of their own in thus striving to save others—the oftener they succeed the nearer they approach to Heaven. This is what is vaguely understood on your earth as purgatory; the sufferings of pure spirits who love and long for the presence of their Creator, and who yet are not pure enough to approach Him. Only by serving and saving others can they obtain at last their own joy.

Every act of ingratitude and forgetfulness and wickedness committed by a mortal, detains one or another of these patient workers longer away from Heaven—imagine then what a weary while many of them have to wait !”

I made no answer, and we floated on. Higher and higher—higher and higher—till at last my guide, whom I knew to be that spirit whom Heliobas had called Azùl, bade me pause. We were floating close together in what seemed a sea of translucent light. From this point I could learn something of the mighty workings of the Universe. I gazed upon countless solar systems, that like wheels within wheels revolved with such rapidity that they seemed all one wheel. I saw planets whirl around and around with breathless swiftness, like glittering balls flung through the air—burning comets flared fiercely past like torches of alarm for God’s wars against Evil—a marvellous procession of

indescribable wonders sweeping on for ever in circles, grand, huge, and immeasurable. And as I watched the superb pageant, I was not startled or confused—I looked upon it as anyone might look on any quiet landscape scene in what we know of Nature. I scarcely could perceive the Earth from whence I had come—so tiny a speck was it—nothing but a mere pin's point in the burning whirl of immensities. I felt, however, perfectly conscious of a superior force in myself to all these enormous forces around me—I knew without needing any explanation that I was formed of an indestructible essence, and that were all these stars and systems suddenly to end in one fell burst of brilliant horror, *I* should still exist—I should know and remember and feel—should be able to watch the birth of a new Universe, and take my part in its growth and design.

“Remind me why these wonders exist,” I said, turning to my guide, and speaking in

those dulcet sounds which were like music and yet like speech ; “and why amid them all the Earth is believed by its inhabitants to have merited destruction, and yet to have been found worthy of redemption ?”

“Thy last question shall be answered first,” replied Azùl. “Seest thou yonder planet circled with a ring ? It is known to the dwellers on Earth, of whom when in clay thou art one, as Saturn. Descend with me !”

And in a breath of time we floated downwards and alighted on a broad and beautiful plain, where flowers of strange shape and colour grew in profusion. Here we were met by creatures of lofty stature and dazzling beauty, human in shape, yet angelic in countenance. They knelt to us with reverence and joy, and then passed on to their toil or pleasure, whichever invited them, and I looked to Azùl for explanation.

“To these children of the Creator,” said

that radiant guide, "is granted the ability to see and to converse with the spirits of the air. They know them and love them, and implore their protection. In this planet sickness and old age are unknown, and death comes as a quiet sleep. The period of existence is about two hundred years, according to the Earth's standard of time ; and the process of decay is no more unlovely than the gentle withering of roses. The influence of the electric belt around their world is a bar to pestilence and disease, and scatters health with light. All sciences, arts, and inventions known on Earth are known here, only to greater perfection. The three important differences between the inhabitants of this planet and those who dwell on Earth, are these : first, they have no rulers in authority, as each one perfectly governs himself ; second, they do not marry, as the law of attraction which draws together any two of opposite sexes, holds them fast in invio-

lable fidelity ; thirdly, there is no creature in all the immensity of this magnificent sphere who has ever doubted, or whoever will doubt, the existence of the Creator."

A thrill of fiery shame seemed to dart through my spiritual being as I heard this, and I made no answer. Some fairy-like little creatures, the children of the Saturnites, as I supposed, here came running towards us and knelt down, reverently clasping their hands in prayer. They then gathered flowers and flung them on that portion of ground where we stood, and gazed at us fearlessly and lovingly, as they might have gazed at some rare bird or butterfly.

Azùl signed to me, and we rose while yet in their sight, and soaring through the radiance of the Belt, which was like a sun woven into a circle, we soon left Saturn far behind us, and alighted on Venus. Here seas, mountains, forests, lakes, and meadows were one vast garden, in which the bloom

and verdure of all worlds seemed to find a home. Here were realized the dreams of sculptors and painters, in the graceful forms and exquisite faces of the women, and the splendid strength and godlike beauty of the men. A brief glance was sufficient to show me that the moving spring of all the civilization of this radiant planet was the love of Nature and Art united. There were no wars—for there were no different nations. All the inhabitants were like one vast family; they worked for one another, and vied with each other in paying homage to those of the loftiest genius among them. They had one supreme Monarch to whom they all rendered glad obedience; and he was a Poet, ready to sacrifice his throne with joy as soon as his people should discover a greater than he. For they all loved not the artist but the Art; and selfishness was a vice unknown. Here, none loved or were wedded save those who had

spiritual sympathies, and here, too, no creature existed who did not believe in and worship the Creator. The same state of things existed in Jupiter, the planet we next visited, where everything was performed by electricity. Here, persons living hundreds of miles apart could yet converse together with perfect ease through an electric medium; ships ploughed the seas by electricity; printing, an art of which the dwellers on Earth are so proud, was accomplished by electricity—in fact, everything in the way of science, art, and invention known to us was also known in Jupiter, only to greater perfection, because tempered and strengthened by an electric force which never failed. From Jupiter, Azùl guided me to many other fair and splendid worlds—yet none of them were Paradise; all had some slight drawback—some physical or spiritual ailment, as it were, which had to be combated with and conquered. All the in-

habitants of each star longed for something they had not—something better, greater, and higher—and therefore all had discontent. They could not realize their best desires in the state of existence they then were, therefore they all suffered disappointment. They were all compelled to work in some way or another ; they were all doomed to die. Yet, unlike the dwellers on Earth, they did not, because their lives were more or less constrained and painful, complain of or deny the goodness of God—on the contrary, they believed in a future state which should be as perfect as their present one was imperfect ; and the chief aim and object of all their labours was to become worthy of attaining that final grand result—Eternal Happiness and Peace.

“ Readest thou the lesson in these glowing spheres, teeming with life and learning ?” murmured Azùl to me, as we soared swiftly on together. “ Know that not one

smallest world in all the myriad systems circling before thee, holds a single human creature who doubts his Maker. Not one! except thine own doomed star! Behold it yonder—sparkling feebly, like a faint flame amid sunshine—how poor a speck it is—how like a scarcely visible point in all the brilliancy of the ever-revolving wheel of Life! Yet there dwell the dwarfs of clay—the men and women who pretend to love while they secretly hate and despise one another. There, wealth is a god, and the greed of gain a virtue. There, genius starves, and heroism dies unrewarded. There, faith is martyred, and unbelief elected sovereign monarch of the people. There, the sublime, unreachable mysteries of the Universe are haggled over by poor finite minds who cannot call their lives their own. There, nation wars against nation, creed against creed, soul against soul. Alas, fated planet! how soon shalt thou be extinct,

and thy place shall know thee no more!"

I gazed earnestly at my radiant guide. "If that is true," I said, "why then should we have a legend that God, in the person of one called Christ, came to die for so miserable and mean a race of beings?"

Azùl answered not, but turned her luminous eyes upon me with a sort of wide dazzling wonder. Some strange impelling force bore me onward, and before I could realize it I was alone. Alone, in a vast area of light through which I floated, serene and conscious of power. A sound falling from a great height reached me; it was first like a grand organ-chord, and then like a voice, trumpet-clear and far-echoing.

"Spirit that searchest for the Unseen," it said, "because I will not that one atom of true worth should perish, unto thee shall be given a vision—unto thee shall be taught a lesson thou dreamest not of.

Thou shalt create ; *thou* shalt design and plan ; *thou* shalt be worshipped, and *thou* shalt destroy ! Rest therefore in the light and behold the things that are in the light, for the time cometh when all that seemeth clear and visible now shall be but darkness. And they that love me not shall have no place of abode in that hour !”

The voice ceased. Awed, yet consoled, I listened for it again. There was no more sound. Around me was illimitable light—illimitable silence. But a strange scene unfolded itself swiftly before me—a sort of shifting dream that was a reality, yet so wonderfully unreal—a vision that impressed itself on every portion of my intelligence ; a kind of spirit-drama in which I was forced to enact the chief part, and where a mystery that I had deemed impenetrable was made perfectly clear and simple of comprehension.



CHAPTER II.

A MINIATURE CREATION.

IN my heaven-uplifted dream, I thought I saw a circular spacious garden in which all the lovely landscapes of a superior world appeared to form themselves by swift degrees. The longer I looked at it, the more beautiful it became, and a little star shone above it like a sun. Trees and flowers sprang up under my gaze, and all stretched themselves towards me, as though for protection. Birds flew about and sang; some of them tried to get as near as possible to the little sun they saw; and other living

creatures began to move about in the shadows of the groves, and on the fresh green grass. All the wonderful workings of Nature, as known to us in the world, took place over again in this garden, which seemed somehow to belong to me ; and I watched everything with a certain satisfaction and delight. Then the idea came to me that the place would be fairer if there were either men or angels to inhabit it ; and quick as light a whisper came to me :

“ Create !”

And I thought in my dream that by the mere desire of my being, expressed in waves of electric warmth that floated downwards from me to the earth I possessed, my garden was suddenly filled with men, women, and children, each of whom had a small portion of myself in them, inasmuch as it was I who made them move and talk and occupy themselves in all manner of amusements. Many of them knelt down

to me and prayed, and offered thanksgivings for having been created ; but some of them went instead to the little star, which they called a sun, and thanked that, and prayed to that instead. Then others went and cut down the trees in the garden, and dug up stones and built themselves little cities, where they all dwelt together like flocks of sheep, and ate and drank and made merry with the things I had given them. Then I thought that I increased their intelligence and quickness of perception, and by-and-by they grew so proud that they forgot everything but themselves. They ceased to remember how they were created, and they cared no more to offer praises to their little sun, that through me gave them light and heat. But because something of my essence still was in them, they always instinctively sought to worship a superior creature to themselves ; and puzzling themselves in their folly, they made hideous images of wood and clay,

unlike anything in heaven or earth, and offered sacrifices and prayer to these lifeless puppets instead of to me. Then I turned away my eyes in sorrow and pity, but never in anger; for I could not be wrathful with these children of my own creation. And when I thus turned away my eyes, all manner of evil came upon the once fair scene—pestilence and storm, disease and vice. A dark shadow stole between my little world and me—the shadow of the people's own wickedness. And as every delicate fibre of my spiritual being repelled evil by the necessity of the pure light in which I dwelt serene, I waited patiently for the mists to clear, so that I might again behold the beauty of my garden. Suddenly a soft clamour smote upon my sense of hearing, and a slender stream of light, like a connecting ray, seemed to be flung upwards through the darkness that hid me from the people I had created and loved. I knew the sound

—it was the mingled music of the prayers of children. An infinite pity and pleasure touched me, my being thrilled with love and tenderness; and yielding to these little ones who asked me for protection, I turned my eyes again towards the garden I had designed for fairness and pleasure. But alas! how changed it had become! No longer fresh and sweet, the people had turned it into a wilderness; they had divided it into small portions, and in so doing had divided themselves into separate companies called nations, all of whom fought with each other fiercely for their different little parterres or flower-beds. Some haggled and talked incessantly over the mere possession of a stone which they called a rock; others busied themselves in digging a little yellow metal out of the earth, which, when once obtained, seemed to make the owners of it mad, for they straightway forgot everything else. As I looked, the darkness between me and my

creation grew denser, and was only pierced at last by those long wide shafts of radiance caused by the innocent prayers of those who still remembered me. And I was full of regret, for I saw my people wandering hither and thither, restless and dissatisfied, perplexed by their own errors, and caring nothing for the love I bore them. Then some of them advanced and began to question why they had been created, forgetting completely how their lives had been originally designed by me for happiness, love and wisdom. Then they accused me of the existence of evil, refusing to see that where there is light there is also darkness, and that darkness is the rival force of the Universe, whence cometh silently the Unnamable Oblivion of Souls. They could not see, my self-willed children, that they had of their own desire sought the darkness and found it; and now, because it gloomed above them like a pall, they refused to believe in the

light where still I was, loving and striving to attract them still. Yet it was not all darkness, and I knew that even what there was might be repelled and cleared away if only my people would turn towards me once more. So I sent down upon them all possible blessings—some they rejected angrily, some they snatched at and threw away again, as though they were poor and trivial—none of them were they thankful for, and none did they desire to keep. And the darkness above them deepened, while my anxious pity for them and love increased. For how could I turn altogether away from them, as long as but a few remembered me? There were some of these weak children of mine who loved and honoured me so well that they absorbed some of my light into themselves, and became heroes, poets, musicians, teachers of high and noble thought, and unselfish, devoted martyrs for the sake of the reverence they bore me. There were

women pure and sweet, who wore their existence as innocently as lilies, and who turned to me to seek protection, not for themselves, but for those they loved. There were little children, whose asking voices were like waves of delicious music to my being, and for whom I had a surpassing tenderness. And yet these all were a mere handful compared to the numbers of those who denied my existence, and who had wilfully crushed out and repelled every spark of my essence in themselves. And as I contemplated all this, the voice I had heard at the commencement of my dream rushed towards me like a mighty wind broken through by thunder :

“ Destroy ! ”

A great pity and love possessed me. In deep awe, yet solemn earnestness, I pleaded with that vast commanding voice.

“ Bid me not destroy ! ” I implored.
“ Command me not to disperse into

nothingness these children of my fancy, some of whom yet love and trust to me for safety. Let me strive once more to bring them out of their darkness into the light—to bring them to the happiness I designed them to enjoy. They have not all forgotten me—let me give them more time for thought and recollection !”

Again the great voice shook the air :

“ They love darkness rather than light ; they love the perishable earth of which they are in part composed, better than the germ of immortality with which they were in the beginning endowed. This garden of thine is but a caprice of thy intelligence ; the creatures that inhabit it are soulless and unworthy, and are an offence to that indestructible radiance of which thou art one ray. Therefore I say unto thee again—*destroy !*”

My yearning love grew stronger, and I pleaded with renewed force.

“Oh, thou Unseen Glory!” I cried; “thou who hast filled me with this emotion of love and pity which permeates and supports my existence, how canst thou bid me take this sudden revenge upon my frail creation! No caprice was it that caused me to design it; nothing but a thought of love and a desire of beauty. Even yet I will fulfil my plan—even yet shall these erring children of mine return to me in time, with patience. While one of them still lifts a hand in prayer to me, or gratitude, I cannot destroy! Bid me rather sink into the darkness of the uttermost deep of shadow; only let me save these feeble little ones from destruction!”

The voice replied not. A flashing opal brilliancy shot across the light in which I rested, and I beheld an Angel, grand, lofty, majestic, with a countenance in which shone the lustre of a myriad summer mornings.

“Spirit that art escaped from the Sorrowful Star,” it said in accents clear and sonorous, “wouldst thou indeed be content to suffer the loss of heavenly joy and peace, in order to rescue thy perishing creation?”

“I would!” I answered; “if I understood death, I would die to save one of those frail creatures, who seek to know me and yet cannot find me through the darkness they have brought upon themselves.”

“To die,” said the Angel, “to understand death, thou wouldst need to become one of them, to take upon thyself their form—to imprison all that brilliancy of which thou art now composed, into a mean and common case of clay; and even if thou couldst accomplish this, would thy children know thee or receive thee?”

“Nay, but if I could suffer shame by them,” I cried impetuously, “I could not

suffer sin. My being would be incapable of error, and I would show these creatures of mine the bliss of purity, the joy of wisdom, the ecstasy of light, the certainty of immortality, if they followed me. And then I would die to show them death is easy, and that in dying they would come to me and find their happiness for ever."

The stature of the Angel grew more lofty and magnificent, and its star-like eyes flashed fire.

"Then, oh thou wanderer from the Earth!" it said, "understandest thou not the Christ?"

A deep awe trembled through me. Meanwhile the garden I had thought a world appeared to roll up like a cloudy scroll, and vanished, and I knew that it had been a vision, and no more.

"Oh doubting and foolish Spirit!" went on the Angel—"thou who art but one point of living light in the Supreme Radi-

ance, even *thou* wouldst consent to immure thyself in the darkness of mortality for sake of thy fancied creation! Even *thou* wouldst submit to suffer and to die, in order to show the frail children of thy dream a purely sinless and spiritual example! Even *thou* hast had the courage to plead with the One All-Sufficing Voice against the destruction of what to thee was but a mirage floating in this ether! Even *thou* hast had love, forgiveness, pity! Even *thou* wouldst be willing to dwell among the creatures of thy fancy as one of them, knowing in thy inner self that by so doing thy spiritual presence would have marked thy little world for ever as sanctified and impossible to destroy. Even *thou* wouldst sacrifice a glory to answer a child's prayer—even *thou* wouldst have patience! And yet *thou* hast dared to deny to God those attributes which *thou* thyself dost possess—He so great and vast—*thou* so small and slight! For

the love thou feelest throbbing through thy being, He is the very commencement and perfection of all love; if thou hast pity, He has ten thousand times more pity; if *thou* canst forgive, remember that from Him flows all thy power of forgiveness! There is nothing thou canst do, even at the highest height of spiritual perfection, that He cannot surpass by a thousand million fold! Neither shalt thou refuse to believe that He can also suffer. Know that nothing is more godlike than unselfish sorrow—and the grief of the Creator over one erring human soul is as vast as He Himself is vast. Why wouldst thou make of Him a being destitute of the best emotions that He Himself bestows upon thee? *Thou* wouldst have entered into thy dream-world and lived in it and died in it, if by so doing thou couldst have drawn one of thy creatures back to the love of thee; and wilt thou not receive the Christ?"

I bowed my head, and a flood of joy rushed through me.

“I believe—I believe and I love!” I murmured. “Desert me not, O radiant Angel! I feel and know that all these wonders must soon pass away from my sight; but wilt thou also go?”

The Angel smiled and touched me.

“I am thy guardian,” it said. “I have been with thee always. I can never leave thee so long as thy soul seeks spiritual things. Asleep or awake on the Earth, wherever thou art, I also am. There have been times when I have warned thee and thou wouldst not listen, when I have tried to draw thee onward and thou wouldst not come; but now I fear no more thy disobedience, for thy restlessness is past. Come with me; it is permitted thee to see far off the vision of the Last Circle.”

The glorious figure raised me gently by the hand, and we floated on and on, higher

and higher, past little circles which my guide told me were all solar systems, though they looked nothing but slender garlands of fire, so rapidly did they revolve and so swiftly did we pass them. Higher and higher we went, till even to my untiring spirit the way seemed long. Beautiful creatures in human shape, but as delicate as gossamer, passed us every now and then, some in bands of twos and threes, some alone; and the higher we soared the more dazzlingly lovely these inhabitants of the air seemed to be.

“They are all born of the Great Circle,” my guardian Angel explained to me; “and to them is given the power of communicating high thought or inspiration. Among them are the Spirits of Music, of Poesy, of Prophecy, and of all Art ever known in all worlds. The success of their teaching depends on how much purity and unselfishness there is in the soul to which they whisper their divine messages—

messages as brief as telegrams which must be listened to with entire attention and acted upon at once, or the lesson is lost and may never come again."

Just then, I saw a Shape coming towards me as of a lovely fair-haired child, who seemed to be playing softly on a strange glittering instrument like a broken cloud strung through with sunbeams. Heedless of consequences, I caught at its misty robe in a wild effort to detain it. It obeyed my touch, and turned its deeply luminous eyes first upon me, and then upon the Angel who accompanied my flight.

"What seekest thou?" it asked in a voice like the murmuring of the wind among flowers.

"Music!" I answered. "Sing me thy melodies—fill me with harmonies divine and unreachable—and I will strive to be worthy of thy teachings."

The young Shape smiled and drew closer towards me.

“Thy wish is granted, Sister Spirit!” it replied. “The pity I shall feel for thy fate when thou art again pent in clay, shall be taught thee in minor music—thou shalt possess the secret of unwritten sound, and I will sing to thee and bring thee comfort. On Earth, call but my name—Aeon! and thou shalt behold me. For thy longing voice is known to the Children of Music, and hath oft shaken the vibrating light wherein they dwell. Fear not! As long as thou dost love me, I am thine.” And parting slowly, still smiling, the lovely vision, with its small radiant hands ever wandering among the starry strings of its cloud-like lyre, floated onward.

Suddenly a clear voice said “Welcome!” and looking up I saw my first friend Azùl. I smiled in glad recognition—I would have spoken—but lo! a wide immensity of blazing glory broke like many-coloured

lightning around me—so dazzling, so overpowering, that I instinctively drew back and paused—I felt I could go no further.

“Here,” said my guardian gently—“here ends thy journey. Would that it were possible, poor Spirit, for thee to pass this boundary! But that may not be—as yet. In the meanwhile thou mayest gaze for a brief space upon the majestic sphere which mortals dream of as Heaven. Behold and see how fair is the incorruptible perfection of God’s World!”

I looked and trembled—I should have sunk yet further backward, had not Azùl and my Angel-guide held me with their light yet forcible clasp. My heart fails me now as I try to write of that tremendous, that sublime scene—the Centre of the Universe—the Cause of all Creation. How unlike Heaven such as we in our ignorance have tried to depict! though it is far better we should have a mistaken

idea than none at all. What I beheld was a Circle, so huge that no mortal measurements could compass it—a wide Ring composed of seven colours, rainbow-like, but flashing with perpetual motion and brilliancy, as though a thousand million suns were for ever being woven into it to feed its transcendent lustre. From every part of this Ring darted long broad shafts of light, some of which stretched out so far that I could not see where they ended; sometimes a bubbling shower of lightning sparks would be flung out on the pure ether, and this would instantly form into circles, small or great, and whirl round and round the enormous girdle of flame from which they had been cast, with the most inconceivable rapidity. But wonderful as the Ring was, it encompassed a Sphere yet more marvellous and dazzling; a great Globe of opal-tinted light, revolving as it were upon its own axis, and ever surrounded by that scintillating, jewel-like

wreath of electricity, whose only motion was to shine and burn within itself for ever. I could not bear to look upon the brightness of that magnificent central World—so large that multiplying the size of the sun by a hundred thousand millions, no adequate idea could be formed of its vast proportions. And ever it revolved—and ever the Rainbow Ring around it glittered and cast forth those other rings which I knew now were living solar systems cast forth from that electric band as a volcano casts forth fire and lava. My Angel-guide motioned me to look towards that side of the Ring which was nearest to the position of the Earth. I looked, and perceived that there the shafts of descending light formed themselves as they fell into the shape of a Cross. At this, such sorrow, love, and shame overcame me, that I knew not where to turn. I murmured :

“Send me back again, dear Angel—

send me back to that Star of Sorrow and Error. Let me hasten to make amends there for all my folly—let me try to teach others what now I know. I am unworthy to be here beside thee—I am unfit to look on yonder splendid World—let me return to do penance for my sins and shortcomings; for what am I that God should bless me? and though I should consume myself in labour and suffering, how can I ever hope to deserve the smallest place in that heavenly glory I now partly behold?” And could spirits shed tears, I should have wept with remorse and grief.

Azùl spoke, softly and tenderly :

“Now thou dost believe—henceforth thou must love. Love alone can pass yon flaming barrier—love alone can gain for thee eternal bliss. In love and for love were all things made—God loveth His creatures, even so let His creatures love Him, and so shall the twain be drawn together.”

“Listen!” added my Angel-guide. “Thou hast not travelled so far as yet to remain in ignorance. That burning Ring thou seest is the result of the Creator’s ever-working Intelligence; from it all the Universe hath sprung. It is exhaustless and perpetually creative; it is pure and perfect electricity. The smallest spark of that fiery essence in a mortal frame is sufficient to form a soul or spirit, such as mine, or that of Azùl, or thine, when thou art perfected. The huge world rolling within the Ring is where God dwells. Dare not thou to question His shape, His look, His mien! Know that He is the Supreme Spirit in which all Beauty, all Perfection, all Love, find consummation. His breath is the fire of the Ring; His look, His pleasure, cause the motion of His World and all worlds. There, where He dwells, dwell also all pure souls; there all desires have fulfilment without satiety, and there all

loveliness, wisdom or pleasure known in any or all of the other spheres are also known. Speak, Azùl, and tell this wanderer from Earth what she will gain in winning her place in Heaven.”

Azùl looked tenderly upon me, and said :

“When thou hast slept the brief sleep of death, when thou art permitted to throw off for ever thy garb of clay, and when by thine own ceaseless love and longing thou hast won the right to pass the great Circle, thou shalt find thyself in a land where the glories of the natural scenery alone shall overpower thee with joy—scenery that for ever changes into new wonders and greater beauty. Thou shalt hear music such as thou canst not dream of. Thou shalt find friends, beyond all imagination fair and faithful. Thou shalt read and see the history of all the planets, produced for thee in an ever-moving panorama. Thou shalt love and

be beloved for ever by thine own Twin Soul; wherever that spirit may be now, it must join thee hereafter. The joys of learning, memory, consciousness, sleep, waking, and exercise shall all be thine. Sin, sorrow, pain, disease and death thou shalt know no more. Thou shalt be able to remember happiness, to possess it, and to look forward to it. Thou shalt have full and pleasant occupation without fatigue—thy food and substance shall be light and air. Flowers, rare and imperishable, shall bloom for thee; birds of exquisite form and tender voice shall sing to thee; angels shall be thy companions. Thou shalt have fresh and glad desires to offer to God with every portion of thy existence, and each one shall be granted as soon as asked, for then thou wilt not be able to ask anything that is displeasing to Him. But because it is a joy to wish, thou shalt wish; and because it is a joy to grant, so also will He grant. No delight,

small or great, is wanting in that vast sphere ; only sorrow is lacking, and satiety and disappointment have no place. Wilt thou seek for admittance there, or wilt thou faint by the way and grow weary ?”

I raised my eyes full of ecstasy and reverence.

“ My mere efforts must count as nothing,” I said ; “ but if Love can help me, I will love and long for God’s World until I die !”

My guardian Angel pointed to those rays of light I had before noticed, that slanted downwards towards Earth in the form of a cross.

“ That is the path by which *thou* must travel. Mark it well. All pilgrims from the Sorrowful Star must journey by that road. Woe to them that turn aside to roam ’mid spheres they know not of, to lose themselves in seas of light wherein they cannot steer ! Remember my warning ! And now, Spirit who art commended

to my watchful care, thy brief liberty is ended. Thou has been lifted up to the outer edge of the Electric Circle; further we dare not take thee. Hast thou aught else to ask before the veil of mortality again enshrouds thee?"

I answered not, but within myself I formed a wild desire. The Electric Ring flashed fiercely on my uplifted eyes, but I kept them fixed hopefully and lovingly on its intensely deep brilliancy.

"If love and faith can avail me," I murmured, "I shall see what I have sought."

I was not disappointed. The fiery waves of light parted on either side of the spot where I with my companions rested; and a Figure, majestic, unutterably grand and beautiful, approached me. At the same moment a number of other faces and forms shone hoveringly out of the Ring; one I noticed like an exquisitely beautiful woman, with floating hair and

clear, earnest, unfathomable eyes. Azùl and the Angel sank reverently down and drooped their radiant heads like flowers in hot sunshine. I alone, daringly, yet with inexpressible affection welling up within me, watched with unshrinking gaze the swift advance of that supreme Figure, upon whose broad brows rested the faint semblance of a Crown of Thorns. A voice penetratingly sweet addressed me :

“Mortal from the Star I saved from ruin, because thou hast desired Me, I come ! Even as thy former unbelief, shall be now thy faith. Because thou lovest Me, I am with thee. For do I not know thee better than the Angels can ? Have I not dwelt in thy clay, suffered thy sorrows, wept thy tears, died thy deaths ? One with My Father, and yet one with thee, I demand thy love, and so through Me shalt thou attain immortal life.”

I felt a touch upon me like a scorching flame—a thrill rushed through my being—

and then I knew that I was sinking down, down, further and further away. I saw that wondrous Figure standing serene and smiling between the retiring waves of electric radiance. I saw the great inner sphere revolve, and glitter as it rolled, like an enormous diamond encircled with gold and sapphire, and then all suddenly the air grew dim and cloudy, and the sensation of falling became more and more rapid. Azùl was beside me still, and I also perceived the outline of my guardian Angel's form, though that was growing indistinct. I now recalled the request of Heliobas, and spoke :

“ Azùl, tell me what shadow rests upon the life of him to whom I am now returning!”

Azùl looked at me earnestly, and replied :

“ Thou daring one ! Seekest thou to pierce the future fate of others ? Is it not enough for thee to have heard the voice

that maketh the Angels' singing silent, and wouldst thou yet know more?"

I was full of a strange unhesitating courage, therefore I said fearlessly :

"He is thy Beloved one, Azùl—thy Twin Soul; and wilt thou let him fall away from thee when a word or sign might save him?"

"Even as he is my Beloved, so let him not fail to hear my voice," replied Azùl, with a tinge of melancholy. "For though he has accomplished much, he is as yet but mortal. Thou canst guide him thus far; tell him, when death lies like a gift in his hand, let him withhold it, and remember me. And now, my friend—farewell!"

I would have spoken again, but could not. An oppressed sensation came over me, and I seemed to plunge coldly into a depth of inextricable blackness. I felt cramped for room, and struggled for existence, for motion, for breath. What had

happened to me? I wondered indignantly. Was I a fettered prisoner? had I lost the use of my light aërial limbs that had borne me so swiftly through the realms of space? What crushing weight overpowered me? why such want of air and loss of delightful ease? I sighed restlessly and impatiently at the narrow darkness in which I found myself—a sorrowful, deep, shuddering sigh . . . and *woke*. That is to say, I languidly opened mortal eyes to find myself once more pent up in mortal frame, though I retained a perfect remembrance and consciousness of everything I had experienced during my spirit-wanderings. Heliobas stood in front of me with outstretched hands, and his eyes were fixed on mine with a mingled expression of anxiety and authority, which changed into a look of relief and gladness as I smiled at him and uttered his name aloud.



CHAPTER III.

SECRETS OF THE SUN AND MOON.

“**H**AVE I been long away?” I asked, as I raised myself upright in the chair where I had been resting.

“I sent you from hence on Thursday morning at noon,” replied Heliobas. “It is now Saturday evening, and within a few minutes of midnight. I was growing alarmed. I have never known anyone stay absent for so long; and you resisted my authority so powerfully, that I began to fear you would never come back at all.”

“ I wish I had not been compelled to do so !” I said regretfully.

He smiled.

“ No doubt you do. It is the general complaint. Will you stand up now and see how you feel ?”

I obeyed. There was still a slight sensation about me as of being cramped for space ; but this was passing, and otherwise I felt singularly strong, bright and vigorous. I stretched out my hands in unspeakable gratitude to him, through whose scientific power I had gained my recent experience.

“ I can never thank you enough !” I said earnestly. “ I dare say you know something of what I have seen on my journey ?”

“ Something, but not all,” he replied. “ Of course I know what worlds and systems you saw, but what was said to you, or what special lessons were given you for your comfort, I cannot tell.”

“Then I will describe everything while it is fresh upon me,” I returned. “I feel that I must do so in order that you may understand how glad I am,—how grateful I am to you.”

I then related the different scenes through which I had passed, omitting no detail. Heliobas listened with profound interest and attention. When I had finished, he said :

“Yours has been a most wonderful, I may say almost exceptional, experience. It proves to me more than ever the omnipotence of *Will*. Most of those who have been placed by my means in the Uplifted or Electric state of being, have consented to it simply to gratify a sense of curiosity—few therefore have gone beyond the pure ether, where, as in a sea, the planets swim. Cellini, for instance, never went farther than Venus, because in the atmosphere of that planet he met the Spirit that rules and divides his destiny.

Zara—she was daring, and reached the outer rim of the Great Circle ; but even she never caught a glimpse from the great Central Sphere. *You*, differing from these, started with a daring aim which you never lost sight of till you had fulfilled it. How true are those words : ‘ Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you ! ’ It is not possible,” and here he sighed, “ that amid such wonders you could have remembered me—it were foolish on my part to expect it.”

“ I confess I thought nothing of you,” I said frankly, “ till I was approaching Earth again ; but then my memory prompted me in time, and I did not forget your request.”

“ And what did you learn ? ” he asked anxiously.

“ Simply this. Azùl said that I might deliver you this message : When death lies like a gift in your hand, withhold it, and call upon her.”

“As if I did not always guide myself by her promptings!” exclaimed Heliobas, with a tender smile.

“You might forget to do so for once,” I said.

“Never!” he replied fervently. “It could not be. But I thank you, my child, for having thought of me—the message you bring shall be impressed strongly on my mind. Now, before you leave me to-night, I must say a few necessary words.”

He paused, and appeared to consider profoundly for some minutes. At last he spoke.

“I have selected certain writings for your perusal,” he said. “In them you will find full and clear instructions how to cultivate and educate the electric force within you, and thus continue the work I have begun. With these you will also perceive that I have written out the receipt for the volatile fluid which, if taken in a small quantity every day, will keep

you in health, strength, and intellectual vigour, while it will preserve your youth and enjoyment of life to a very much longer extent than that usually experienced by the majority. Understand me well—this liquid of itself cannot put you into an uplifted state of existence; you need *human* electric force applied strongly to your system to compass this; and as it is dangerous to try the experiment too often—dangerous to the body, I mean—it will be as well, as you have work to do yet in this life, not to attempt it again. But if you drink the fluid every morning of your life, and at the same time obey my written manual as to the cultivation of your own inner force, which is already existent in a large degree, you will attain to certain advantages over the rest of the people you meet, which will give you not only physical, but mental power.”

He paused a minute or two, and again went on :

“When you have educated your Will to a certain height of electric command, you can at your pleasure see at any time, and see plainly, the spirits who inhabit the air ; and also those who, descending to long distances below the Great Circle, come within the range of human electricity, or the attractive matter contained in the Earth’s atmosphere. You can converse with them, and they with you. You will also be able, at your desire, to see the parted spirits of dead persons, so long as they linger within Earth’s radius, which they seldom do, being always anxious to escape from it as soon as possible. Love may sometimes detain them, or remorse ; but even these have to yield to the superior longings which possess them the instant they are set free. You will, in your intercourse with your fellow-mortals, be able to discern their motives quickly and unerringly—you will at once discover where you are loved and where you are

disliked ; and not all the learning and logic of so-called philosophers shall be able to cloud your instinct. You will have a keener appreciation of good and beautiful things—a delightful sense of humour, and invariable cheerfulness ; and whatever you do, unless you make some mistake by your own folly, will carry with it its success. And, what is perhaps a greater privilege, you will find that all who are brought into very close contact with you will be beneficially influenced, or the reverse, exactly as you choose to exert your power. I do not think, after what you have seen, you will ever desire to exert a malign influence, knowing that the Creator of your being is all love and forgiveness. At any rate, the greatest force in the universe, electricity, is yours—that is, it has begun to form itself in you—and you have nothing to do but to encourage its growth, just as you would encourage a taste for music or the fine arts. Now let me give you the writings.”

He unlocked a desk, and took from it two small rolls of parchment, one tied with a gold ribbon, the other secured in a kind of case with a clasp. This last he held up before my eyes, and said :

‘This contains my private instructions to you. Never make a single one of them public. The world is not ready for wisdom, and the secrets of science can only be explained to the few. Therefore keep this parchment safely under lock and key, and never let any eye but your own look upon its contents.’

I promised, and he handed it to me. Then taking the other roll which was tied with ribbon, he said :

“Here is written out what I call the Electric Principle of Christianity. This is for your own study and consideration : still if you ever desire to explain my theory to others, I do not forbid you. But, as I told you before, you can never compel belief—the goldfish in a glass bowl will

never understand the existence of the ocean. Be satisfied if you can guide yourself by the compass you have found, but do not grieve if you are unable to guide others. You may try, but it will not be surprising if you fail. Nor will it be your fault. The only sorrow that might happen to you in these efforts would be in case you should love some one very dearly, and yet be unable to instil the truth of what you know into that particular soul. You would then have to make a discovery, which is always more or less painful—namely, that your love was misplaced, inasmuch as the nature you had selected as worthy of love had no part with yours; and that separation utter and eternal must therefore occur, if not in this life, then in the future. So I would say beware of loving, lest you should not love rightly—though I believe you will soon be able to discern clearly the spirit that is by fate destined to complete and perfect your own.

And now, though I know you are scarcely fatigued enough to sleep, I will say good-night."

I took the second roll of parchment from his hand, and opening it a little way I saw that it was covered with very fine small writing. Then I said :

"Does Zara know how long I have been absent?"

"Yes," replied Heliobas ; "and she, like myself, was surprised and anxious. I think she went to bed long ago ; but you may look into her room and see if she is awake, before you yourself retire to rest."

As he spoke of Zara, his eyes grew melancholy and his brow clouded. An instinctive sense of fear came upon me.

"Is she not well?" I asked.

"She is perfectly well," he answered. "Why should you imagine her to be otherwise?"

"Pardon me," I said ; "I fancied that you looked unhappy when I mentioned her."

Heliobas made no answer. He stepped to the window, and throwing back the curtain, called me to his side.

“Look out yonder,” he said in low and earnest tones; “look at the dark blue veil strewn with stars, through which so lately your daring soul pierced its flight! See how the small Moon hangs like a lamp in Heaven, apparently outshining the myriad worlds around her, that are so much vaster and fairer! How deceptive is the human eye!—nearly as deceptive as the human reason. Tell me—why did you not visit the Moon, or the Sun, in your recent wanderings?”

This question caused me some surprise. It was certainly very strange that I had not thought of doing so. Yet, on pondering the matter in my mind, I remembered that during my aërial journey suns and moons had been no more to me than flowers strewn on a meadow. I now regretted that I had not sought to know

something of those two fair luminaries which light and warm our earth.

Heliobas, after watching my face intently, resumed :

“You cannot guess the reason of your omission? I will tell you. There is nothing to see in either Sun or Moon. They were both inhabited worlds once; but the dwellers in the Sun have ages ago lived their lives and passed to the Central Sphere. The Sun is nothing now but a burning world, burning rapidly, and surely, away; or rather, *it is being absorbed back into the Electric Circle from which it originally sprang, to be thrown out again in some new and grander form.* And so with all worlds, suns and systems, for ever and ever! Hundreds of thousands of those brief time-breathings called years may pass before this consummation of the Sun; but its destruction is going on now, or rather its absorption—and we on our cold small star warm ourselves, and are glad, in the light of an empty world on fire!”

I listened with awe and interest.

“And the Moon?” I asked eagerly.

“The Moon does not exist. What we see is the reflection or the *electrograph* of what she once was. Atmospheric electricity has imprinted this picture of a long-ago living world upon the heavens, just as Raphael drew his cartoons for the men of to-day to see.”

“But,” I exclaimed in surprise, “how about the Moon’s influence on the tides? and what of eclipses?”

“Not the Moon, but the electric photograph of a once living but now absorbed world, has certainly an influence on the tides. The sea is impregnated with electricity. Just as the Sun will absorb colours, so the electricity in the sea is repelled or attracted by the electric picture of the Moon in Heaven. Because, as a painting is full of colour, so is that faithful sketch of a vanished sphere, drawn with a pencil of pure light, full of immense elec-

tricity ; and to carry the simile further, just as a painting may be said to be formed of various dark and light tints, so the electric portrait of the Moon contains various degrees of electric force—which, coming in contact with the electricity of the Earth's atmosphere, produces different effects on us and on the natural scenes amid which we dwell. As for eclipses—if you slowly pass a round screen between yourself and a blazing fire, you will only see the edges of the fire. In the same way the *electrograph* of the Moon passes at stated intervals between the Earth and the burning world of the Sun.”

“ Yet surely,” I said, “ the telescope has enabled us to see the Moon as a solid globe—we have discerned mountains and valleys on its surface ; and then it revolves round us regularly—how do you account for these facts ?”

“ The telescope,” returned Heliobas, “ is merely an aid to the human eye ; and,

as I told you before, nothing is so easily deceived as our sense of vision, even when assisted by mechanical appliances. The telescope, like the stereoscope, simply enables us to see the portrait of the Moon more clearly ; but all the same, the Moon, as a world, does not exist. Her likeness, taken by electricity, may last some thousands of years, and as long as it lasts it must revolve around us, because everything in the universe moves, and moves in a circle. Besides which, this portrait of the Moon being composed of pure electricity, is attracted and forced to follow the Earth by the compelling influence of the Earth's own electric power. Therefore, till the picture fades, it must attend the Earth like the haunting spectre of a dead joy. You can understand now why we never see what we imagine to be the *other side* of the Moon. It simply has *no* other side, except space. Space is the canvas—the Moon is a sketch. How interested

we are when a discovery is made of some rare old painting, of which the subject is a perfectly beautiful woman! It bears no name—perhaps no date—but the face that smiles at us is exquisite—the lips yet pout for kisses—the eyes brim over with love! And we admire it tenderly and reverently—we mark it ‘*Portrait of a Lady,*’ and give it an honoured place among our art collections. With how much more reverence and tenderness ought we to look up at the ‘*Portrait of a Fair Lost Sphere,*’ circling yonder in that dense ever-moving gallery of wonders, where the hurrying throng of spectators are living and dying worlds!”

I had followed the speaker’s words with fascinated attention, but now I said :

“Dying, Heliobas? There is no death.”

“True!” he answered, with hesitating slowness. “But there is what we call death—transition—and it is always a parting.”

“But not for long!” I exclaimed, with

all the gladness and eagerness of my lately instructed soul. "As worlds are absorbed into the Electric Circle and again thrown out in new and more glorious forms, so are we absorbed and changed into shapes of perfect beauty, having eyes that are strong and pure enough to look God in the face. The body perishes—but what have *we* to do with the body—our prison and place of experience, except to rejoice when we shake off its weight for ever!"

Heliobas smiled gravely.

"You have learned your high lesson well," he said. "You speak with the assurance and delight of a spirit satisfied. But when I talk of *death*, I mean by that word the parting asunder of two souls who love each other; and though such separation may be brief, still it is always a separation. For instance, suppose——" he hesitated; "suppose Zara were to die?"

"Well, you would soon meet her again,"

I answered. "For though you might live many years after her, still you would know in yourself that those years were but minutes in the realms of space——"

"Minutes that decide our destinies," he interrupted with solemnity. "And there is always this possibility to contemplate—suppose Zara were to leave me now, how can I be sure that I shall be strong enough to live out my remainder of life purely enough to deserve to meet her again? And if not, then Zara's death would mean utter and almost hopeless separation for ever—though perhaps I might begin over again in some other form, and so reach the goal."

He spoke so musingly and seriously that I was surprised, for I had thought him impervious to such a folly as the fear of death.

"You are melancholy, Heliobas," I said. "In the first place, Zara is not going to leave you yet; and secondly, if she did,

you know your strongest efforts would be brought to bear on your career, in order that no shadow of obstinacy or error might obstruct your path. Why, the very essence of our belief is in the strength of Will-power. What we *will* to do, especially if it be any act of spiritual progress, we can always accomplish."

Heliobas took my hand and pressed it warmly.

"You are so lately come from the high regions," he said, "that it warms and invigorates me to hear your encouraging words. Pray do not think me capable of yielding long to the weakness of foreboding. I am, in spite of my advancement in electric science, nothing but a man, and am apt to be hampered oftentimes by my mortal trappings. We have prolonged our conversation further than I intended. I assure you it is better for you to try to sleep, even though, as I know, you feel so wide-wake. Let me give you

a soothing draught ; it will have the effect of composing your physical nerves into steady working order."

He poured something from a small phial into a glass, and handed it to me. I drank it at once, obediently, and with a smile.

"Good-night, my Master!" I then said. "You need have no fear of your own successful upward progress. For if there were the slightest chance of your falling into fatal error, all those human souls you have benefited would labour and pray for your rescue ; and I know now that prayers reach Heaven, so long as they are unselfish. I, though I am one of the least of your disciples, out of the deep gratitude of my heart towards you, will therefore pray unceasingly for you, both here and hereafter."

He bent his head.

"I thank you!" he said simply. "*More deeds are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of!* That is a true saying. God bless you, my child ! Good-night !"

And he opened the door of his study for me to pass out. As I did so, he laid his hand lightly on my head in a sort of unspoken benediction—then he closed his door, and I found myself alone in the great hall. A suspended lamp was burning brightly, and the fountain was gurgling melodiously to itself in a subdued manner, as if it were learning a new song for the morning. I sped across the mosaic pavement with a light eager step, and hurried up the stairs, intent on finding Zara to tell her how happy I felt, and how satisfied I was with my wonderful experience. I reached the door of her bedroom—it was ajar. I softly pushed it farther open, and looked in. A small but exquisitely modelled statue of an “*Eros*” ornamented one corner. His uplifted torch served as a light which glimmered faintly through a rose-coloured glass, and shed a tender lustre over the room; but especially upon the bed, ornamented with rich Oriental

needle-work, where Zara lay fast asleep. How beautiful she looked! Almost as lovely as any one of the radiant spirits I had met in my aërial journey! Her rich dark hair was scattered loosely on the white pillows; her long silky lashes curled softly on the delicately tinted cheeks; her lips, tenderly red, like the colour on budding apple-blossoms in early spring, were slightly parted, showing the glimmer of the small white teeth within; her night-dress was slightly undone, and half-displayed and half-disguised her neck and daintily rounded bosom, on which the electric jewel she always wore glittered brilliantly as it rose and sank with her regular and quiet breathing. One fair hand lay outside the coverlet, and the reflection from the lamp of the "Eros" flickered on a ring which adorned it, making its central diamond flash like a wandering star.

I looked long and tenderly on this perfect ideal of a "Sleeping Beauty," and

then thought I would draw closer and see if I could kiss her without awaking her. I advanced a few steps into the room—when suddenly I was stopped. Within about a yard's distance from the bed a *Something* opposed my approach! I could not move a foot forward—I tried vigorously, but in vain! I could step backward, and that was all. Between me and Zara there seemed to be an invisible barrier, strong and absolutely impregnable. There was nothing to be seen—nothing but the softly shaded room—the ever-smiling “Eros,” and the exquisite reposeful figure of my sleeping friend. Two steps, and I could have touched her; but those two steps I was forcibly prevented from making—as forcibly as though a deep ocean had rolled between her and me. I did not stop long to consider this strange occurrence—I felt sure it had something to do with her spiritual life and sympathy, therefore it neither alarmed nor perplexed me. Kissing

my hand tenderly towards my darling, who lay so close to me, and who was yet so jealously and invisibly guarded during her slumbers, I softly and reverently withdrew. On reaching my own apartment, I was more than half inclined to sit up reading and studying the parchments Heliobas had given me; but on second thoughts I resolved to lock up these precious manuscripts and go to bed. I did so, and before preparing to sleep I remembered to kneel down and offer up praise and honour, with a loving and believing heart, to that Supreme Glory, of which I had been marvellously permitted to enjoy a brief but transcendent glimpse. And as I knelt, absorbed and happy, I heard, like a soft echo falling through the silence of my room, a sound like distant music, through which these words floated towards me: "A new commandment give I unto you, that you love one another even as I have loved you!"



CHAPTER IV.

SOCIABLE CONVERSE.

THE next morning Zara came herself to awaken me, looking as fresh and lovely as a summer morning. She embraced me very tenderly, and said :

“ I have been talking for more than an hour with Casimir. He has told me everything. What wonders you have seen! And are you not happy, dearest? Are you not strong and satisfied ?”

“ Perfectly !” I replied. “ But, O Zara ! what a pity that all the world should not know what we know !”

“All have not a desire for knowledge,” replied Zara. “Even in your vision of the garden you possessed, there were only a few who still sought you; for those few you would have done anything, but for the others your best efforts were in vain.”

“They might not have been always in vain,” I said musingly.

“No, they might not,” agreed Zara. “That is just the case of the world to-day. While there is life in it, there is also hope. And, talking of the world, let me remind you that you are back in it now, and must therefore be hampered with tiresome trivialities. Two of these are as follows: First, here is a letter for you, which has just come; secondly, breakfast will be ready in twenty minutes!”

I looked at her smiling face attentively. She was the very embodiment of vigorous physical health and beauty; it seemed like a dream to remember her in the past

night, guarded by that invincible barrier, the work of no mortal hand. I uttered nothing, however, of these thoughts, and responding to her evident gaiety of heart, I smiled also.

“ I will be down punctually at the expiration of the twenty minutes,” I said. “ I assure you, Zara, I am quite sensible of the claims of earthly existence upon me. For instance, I am very hungry, and I shall enjoy breakfast immensely if you will make the coffee.”

Zara, who among her other accomplishments had the secret of making coffee to perfection, promised laughingly to make it extra well, and flitted from the room, singing softly as she went a fragment of the Neapolitan *Stornello* :

“ Fior di mortelle
Queste manine tue son tanto belle !
Fior di limone
Ti voglio far morire di passione !
Salta ! lari—lirà.”

The letter Zara had brought me was from Mrs. Everard, announcing that she would arrive in Paris that very day, Sunday.

“By the time you get this note,” so ran her words, “we shall have landed at the Grand Hotel. Come and see us at once if you can. The Colonel is anxious to judge for himself how you are looking. If you are really recovered sufficiently to leave your medical *Pension*, we shall be delighted to have you with us again. I, in particular, shall be glad, for it is real lonesome when the Colonel is out, and I do hate to go shopping by myself. So take pity upon your affectionate

“AMY.”

Seated at breakfast, I discussed this letter with Heliobas and Zara, and decided that I would call at the Grand Hotel that morning.

“I wish you would come with me, Zara,” I said wistfully.

—To my surprise, she answered :

“Certainly I will, if you like. But we will attend High Mass at Notre Dame first. There will be plenty of time for the call afterwards.”

I gladly agreed to this, and Heliobas added with cheerful cordiality :

“Why not ask your friends to dine here to-morrow? Zara’s call will be a sufficient opening formality ; and you yourself have been long enough with us now to know that any of your friends will be welcome here. We might have a pleasant little party, especially if you add Mr. and Mrs. Challoner and their daughters to the list. And I will ask Ivan.”

I glanced at Zara when the Prince’s name was uttered, but she made no sign of either offence or indifference.

“You are very hospitable,” I said, addressing Heliobas ; “but I really see no

reason why you should throw open your doors to my friends, unless indeed you specially desire to please me.”

“Why, of course I do!” he replied heartily; and Zara looked up and smiled.

“Then,” I returned, “I will ask them to come. What am I to say about my recovery, which I know is little short of miraculous?”

“Say,” replied Heliobas, “that you have been cured by electricity. There is nothing surprising in such a statement nowadays. But say nothing of the *human* electric force employed upon you—no one would believe you, and the effort to persuade unpersuadable people is always a waste of time.”

An hour after this conversation Zara and I were in the Cathedral of Notre Dame. I attended the service with very different feelings to those I had hitherto experienced during the same ceremony. Formerly my mind had been distracted by harassing doubts and perplexing contradic-

tions ; now everything had a meaning for me—high, and solemn, and sweet. As the incense rose, I thought of those rays of connecting light I had seen, on which prayers travel exactly as sound travels through the telephone. As the grand organ pealed sonorously through the fragrant air, I remembered the ever youthful and gracious Spirits of Music, one of whom, Aeon, had promised to be my friend. Just to try the strength of my own electric force, I whispered the name and looked up. There, on a wide slanting ray of sunlight that fell directly across the altar, was the angelic face I well remembered!—the delicate hands holding the semblance of a harp in air! It was but for an instant I saw it—one brief breathing-space in which its smile mingled with the sunbeams, and then it vanished. But I knew I was not forgotten, and the deep satisfaction of my soul poured itself in unspoken praise on the flood of the

“Sanctus! Sanctus!” that just then rolled triumphantly through the aisles of Notre Dame. Zara was absorbed in silent prayer throughout the Mass; but at its conclusion, when we came out of the cathedral, she was unusually gay and elate. She conversed vivaciously with me concerning the social merits and accomplishments of the people we were going to visit; while the brisk walk through the frosty air brightened her eyes and cheeks into warmer lustre, so that on our arrival at the Grand Hotel she looked to my fancy even lovelier than usual.

Mrs. Everard did not keep us waiting long in the private *salon* to which we were shown. She fluttered down, arrayed in a wonderful “art” gown of terra-cotta and pale blue hues cunningly intermixed, and proceeded to hug me with demonstrative fervour. Then she held me a little distance off, and examined me attentively.

“Do you know,” she said, “you are

simply in lovely condition ! I never would have believed it. You are actually as plump and pink as a peach. And you are the same creature that wailed and trembled, and had palpitations and headaches and stupors ! Your doctor must be a perfect magician. I think I must consult him, for I am sure I don't look half as well as you do."

And indeed she did not. I thought she had a tired, dragged appearance, but I would not say so. I knew her well, and I was perfectly aware that though she was fascinating and elegant in every way, her life was too much engrossed in trifles ever to yield her healthy satisfaction.

After responding warmly to her affectionate greeting, I said :

" Amy, you must allow me to introduce the sister of my doctor to you. Madame Zara Casimir—Mrs. Everard."

Zara, who had moved aside a little way out of delicacy, to avoid intruding on

our meeting, now turned, and with her own radiant smile and exquisite grace, stretched out her little well-gloved hand.

“I am delighted to know you!” she said, in those sweet penetrating accents of hers which were like music. “*Your* friend,” here indicating me by a slight yet tender gesture, “has also become mine; but I do not think we shall be jealous, shall we?”

Mrs. Everard made some attempt at a suitable reply, but she was so utterly lost in admiration of Zara’s beauty, that her habitual self-possession almost deserted her. Zara, however, had the most perfect tact, and with it the ability of making herself at home anywhere, and we were soon all three talking cheerfully and without constraint. When the Colonel made his appearance, which he did very shortly, he too was “taken off his feet,” as the saying is, by Zara’s loveliness, and the same effect was produced on the Challoners

who soon afterwards joined us in a body. Mrs. Challoner, in particular, seemed incapable of moving her eyes from the contemplation of my darling's sweet face, and I glowed with pride and pleasure as I noted how greatly she was admired. Miss Effie Challoner alone, who was, by a certain class of young men, considered "doooid pretty, with go in her," opposed her stock of physical charms to those of Zara, with a certain air of feminine opposition; but she was only able to keep this barrier up for a little time. Zara's winning power of attraction was too much for her, and she, like all present, fell a willing captive to the enticing gentleness, the intellectual superiority, and the sympathetic influence exercised by the evenly balanced temperament and character of the beautiful woman I loved so well. After some desultory and pleasant chat, Zara, in the name of her brother and herself, invited Colonel and Mrs. Everard and the

Challoner family to dine at the Hôtel Mars next day—an invitation which was accepted by all with eagerness. I perceived at once that every one of them was anxious to know more of Zara and her surroundings—a curiosity which I could not very well condemn. Mrs. Everard then wanted me to remain with her for the rest of the afternoon; but an instinctive feeling came upon me, that soon perhaps I should have to part from Heliobas and Zara, and all the wonders and delights of their household, in order to resume my own working life—therefore I determined I would drain my present cup of pleasure to the last drop. So I refused Amy's request, pleading as an excuse that I was still under my doctor's authority, and could not indulge in such an excitement as an afternoon in her society without his permission. Zara bore me out in this assertion, and added for me to Mrs. Everard :

“ Indeed, I think it will be better for her to remain perfectly quiet with us for a day or two longer ; then she will be thoroughly cured, and free to do as she likes.”

“ Well !” said Mrs. Challoner ; “ I must say she doesn’t look as if anything were the matter with her. In fact, I never saw two more happy healthy-looking girls than you both. What secret do you possess to make yourselves look so bright ?”

“ No secret at all,” replied Zara, laughing ; “ we simply follow the exact laws of health, and they suffice.”

Colonel Everard, who had been examining me critically and asking me a few questions, here turned to Zara and said :

“ Do you really mean to say, Madame Casimir, that your brother cured this girl by electricity ?”

“ Purely so !” she answered earnestly.

“ Then it’s the most wonderful recovery I ever saw. Why, at Cannes, she was hollow-eyed, pale, and thin as a willow-

wand ; now she looks—well, she knows how she is herself—but if she feels as spry as she looks, she’s in first-rate training !”

I laughed.

“ I *do* feel spry, Colonel,” I said. “ Life seems to me like summer sunshine.”

“ Brava !” exclaimed Mr. Challoner. He was a staid, rather slow Kentuckian who seldom spoke, and when he did, seemed to find it rather an exertion. “ If there’s one class of folk I detest more than another, it is those all-possessed people who find life unsuited to their fancies. Nobody asked them to come into it—nobody would miss them if they went out of it. Being in it, it’s barely civil to grumble at the Deity who sent them along here. I never do it myself if I can help it.”

We laughed, and Mrs. Challoner’s eyes twinkled.

“ In England, dear, for instance,” she said, with a mischievous glance at her

spouse—"in England you never grumbled, did you?"

Mr. Challoner looked volumes — his visage reddened, and he clenched his broad fist with ominous vigour.

"Why, by the Lord!" he said, with even more than his usual deliberate utterance, "in England the liveliest flea that ever gave a triumphal jump in air would find his spirits inclined to droop! I tell you, ma'am," he continued, addressing himself to Zara, whose merry laugh rang out like a peal of little golden bells at this last remark—"I tell you that when I walked in the streets of London I used to feel as if I were one of a band of criminals. Every person I met looked at me as if the universe were about to be destroyed next minute; and that they had to build another up right away without God to help 'em!"

"Well, I believe I agree with you," said Colonel Everard. "The English take life too seriously. In their craze for business

they manage to do away with pleasure altogether. They seem afraid to laugh, and they even approach the semblance of a smile with due caution."

"I'm free to confess," added his wife, "that I'm not easily chilled through. But an English 'at home' acts upon me like a patent refrigerator—I get regularly frozen to the bone!"

"Dear me!" laughed Zara; "you give very bad accounts of Shakespeare's land! It must be very sad!"

"I believe it wasn't always so," pursued Colonel Everard; "there are legends which speak of it as *Merrie England*. I dare say it might have been merry once, before it was governed by shopkeepers; but now, you must get away from it if you want to enjoy life. At least such is my opinion. But have you never been in England, Madame Casimir? You speak English perfectly."

"Oh, I am a fairly good linguist," replied

Zara, "thanks to my brother. But I have never crossed the Channel."

The Misses Challoner looked politely surprised; their father's shrewd face wore an expression of grim contentment.

"Don't cross it, ma'am," he said emphatically, "unless you have a special desire to be miserable. If you want to know how Christians love one another, and how to be made limply and uselessly wretched, spend a Sunday in London."

"I think I will not try the experiment, Mr. Challoner," returned Zara gaily. "Life is short, and I prefer to enjoy it."

"Say," interrupted Mrs. Challoner, turning to me at this juncture, "now you are feeling so well, would it be asking you too much to play us a piece of your own improvising?"

I glanced at the grand piano, which occupied a corner of the *salon* where we sat, and hesitated. But at a slight nod from Zara, I rose, drew off my gloves, and

seated myself at the instrument, which, to my satisfaction, I saw was one of my favourites, a "Pleyell." Passing my hands lightly over the keys, I wandered through a few running passages; and as I did so, murmured a brief petition to my aërial friend Aeon. Scarcely had I done this, when a flood of music seemed to rush to my brain and thence to my fingers, and I played, hardly knowing what I played, but merely absorbed in trying to give utterance to the sounds which were falling softly upon my inner sense of hearing like drops of summer rain on a thirsty soil. I was just aware that I was threading the labyrinth of a minor key, and that the result was a network of delicate and tender melody reminding me of Heinrich Heine's words :

"Lady, did you not hear the nightingale sing? A beautiful silken voice—a web of happy notes—and my soul was taken in its meshes, and strangled and tortured thereby."

A few minutes, and the inner voice that conversed with me so sweetly, died away into silence, and at the same time my fingers found their way to the closing chord. As one awaking from a dream, I looked up. The little group of friendly listeners were rapt in the deepest attention; and when I ceased, a murmur of admiration broke from them all, while Zara's eyes glistened with sympathetic tears.

"How *can* you do it?" asked Mrs. Challoner in good-natured amazement. "It seems to me impossible to compose like that while seated at the piano, and without taking previous thought!"

"It is not *my* doing," I began; "it seems to come to me from——"

But I was checked by a look from Zara, that gently warned me not to hastily betray the secret of my spiritual communion with the unseen sources of harmony. So I smiled and said no more. Inwardly I was full of a great rejoicing, for I knew

that however well I had played in past days, it was nothing compared to the vigour and ease which were now given to me—a sort of unlocking of the storehouse of music, with freedom to take my choice of all its vast treasures.

“Well, it’s what *we* call inspiration,” said Mr. Challoner, giving my hand a friendly grasp, “and wherever it comes from, it must be a great happiness to yourself as well as to others.”

“It is,” I answered earnestly. “I believe few are so perfectly happy in music as I am.”

Mrs. Everard looked thoughtful.

“No amount of practice could make *me* play like that,” she said; “yet I have had two or three masters who were supposed to be first-rate. One of them was a German, who used to clutch his hair like a walking tragedian whenever I played a wrong note. I believe he got up his reputation entirely by that clutch, for he often played wrong notes

himself without minding it. But just because he worked himself into a sort of frenzy when others went wrong, everybody praised him, and said he had such an ear and was so sensitive that he must be a great musician. He worried me nearly to death over Bach's 'Well-tempered Klavier'—all to no purpose, for I can't play a note of it now, and shouldn't care to if I could. I consider Bach a dreadful old bore, though I know it is heresy to say so. Even Beethoven is occasionally prosy, only no one will be courageous enough to admit it. People would rather go to sleep over classical music than confess they don't like it."

"Schubert would have been a grander master than Beethoven, if he had only lived long enough," said Zara; "but I dare say very few will agree with me in such an assertion. Unfortunately most of my opinions differ from those of everyone else."

“ You should say *fortunately*, madame,” said Colonel Everard, bowing gallantly ; “ as the circumstance has the happy result of making you perfectly original as well as perfectly charming.”

Zara received this compliment with her usual sweet equanimity, and we rose to take our leave. As we were passing out, Amy Everard drew me back and crammed into the pocket of my cloak a newspaper.

“ Read it when you are alone,” she whispered ; “ and you will see what Raffaello Cellini has done with the sketch he made of you.”

We parted from these pleasant Americans with cordial expressions of goodwill, Zara reminding them of their engagement to visit her at her own home next day, and fixing the dinner-hour for half-past seven.

On our return to the Hôtel Mars, we found Heliobas in the drawing-room, deep in converse with a Catholic priest—a fine-looking man of venerable and noble

features. Zara addressed him as "Father Paul," and bent humbly before him to receive his blessing, which he gave her with almost parental tenderness. He seemed, from his familiar manner with them, to be a very old friend of the family.

On my being introduced to him, he greeted me with gentle courtesy, and gave me also his simple unaffected benediction. We all partook of a light luncheon together, after which repast Heliobas and Father Paul withdrew together. Zara looked after their retreating figures with a sort of meditative pathos in her large eyes; and then she told me she had something to finish in her studio—would I excuse her for about an hour? I readily consented, for I myself was desirous of passing a little time in solitude, in order to read the manuscripts Heliobas had given me. "For," thought I, "if there is anything in them not quite clear to me, he will explain

it, and I had better take advantage of his instruction while I can."

As Zara and I went upstairs together, we were followed by Leo—a most unusual circumstance, as that faithful animal was generally in attendance on his master. Now, however, he seemed to have something oppressive on his mind, for he kept close to Zara, and his big brown eyes, whenever he raised them to her face, were full of intense melancholy. His tail drooped in a forlorn way, and all the vivacity of his nature seemed to have gone out of him.

"Leo does not seem well," I said, patting the dog's beautiful silky coat, an attention to which he responded by a heavy sigh and a wistful gaze approaching to tears. Zara looked at him.

"Poor Leo!" she murmured caressingly. "Perhaps he feels lonely. Do you want to come with your mistress to-day, old boy? So you shall. Come along—cheer up, Leo!"

And, nodding to me, she passed into her studio, the dog following her. I turned into my own apartment, and then bethought myself of the newspaper Mrs. Everard had thrust into my pocket. It was a Roman journal, and the passage marked for my perusal ran as follows :

“The picture of the *Improvvisatrice*, painted by our countryman Signor Raffaello Cellini, has been purchased by Prince N—— for the sum of forty thousand francs. The Prince generously permits it to remain on view for a few days longer, so that those who have not yet enjoyed its attraction, have yet time to behold one of the most wonderful pictures of the age. The colouring yet remains a marvel to both students and connoisseurs, and the life-like appearance of the girl’s figure, robed in its clinging white draperies ornamented with lilies of the valley, is so strong, that one imagines she will step out of the canvas and confront the bystanders.

Signor Cellini must now be undoubtedly acknowledged as one of the greatest geniuses of modern times."

I could see no reason, as I perused this, to be sure that *I* had served as the model for this successful work of art, unless the white dress and the lilies of the valley, which I had certainly worn at Cannes, were sufficient authority for forming such a conclusion. Still I felt quite a curiosity about the picture—the more so as I could foresee no possible chance of my ever beholding it. I certainly should not go to Rome on purpose, and in a few days it would be in the possession of Prince N——, a personage whom in all probability I should never know. I put the newspaper carefully by, and then turned my mind to the consideration of quite another subject—namely, the contents of my parchment documents. The first one I opened was that containing the private instructions of Heliobas to myself for the

preservation of my own health, and the cultivation of the electric force within me. These were so exceedingly simple, and yet so wonderful in their simplicity, that I was surprised. They were based upon the plainest and most reasonable common-sense arguments—easy enough for a child to understand. Having promised never to make them public, it is impossible for me to give the slightest hint of their purport; but I may say at once, without trespassing the bounds of my pledged word, that if these few concise instructions were known and practised by everyone, doctors would be entirely thrown out of employment, and chemists' shops would no longer cumber the streets. Illness would be very difficult of attainment—though in the event of its occurring each individual would know how to treat him or herself—and life could be prolonged easily and comfortably to more than a hundred years, barring, of course, accidents by sea, rail and

road, or by deeds of violence. But it will take many generations before the world is *universally* self-restrained enough to follow such plain maxims as those laid down for me in the writing of my benefactor, Heliobas—even if it be ever self-restrained at all, which, judging from the present state of society, is much to be doubted. Therefore, no more of the subject, on which, indeed, I am forbidden to speak.

The other document, called “The Electric Principle of Christianity,” I found so curious and original, suggesting so many new theories concerning that religion which has civilized a great portion of humanity, that as I am not restrained by any promise on this point, I have resolved to give it here in full. My readers must not be rash enough to jump to the conclusion that I set it forward as an explanation or confession of my own faith; my creed has nothing to do with anyone save myself. I simply copy the

manuscript I possess, as the theory of a deeply read and widely intelligent man, such as Heliobas undoubtedly *was* and *is*; a man, too, in whose veins runs the blood of the Chaldean kings,—earnest and thoughtful Orientals, who were far wiser in their generation perhaps than we, with all our boasted progress, are in ours. The coincidences which have to do with electrical science will, I believe, be generally admitted to be curious if not convincing. To me, of course, they are only fresh proofs of *what I know*, because *I have seen the Great Electric Circle*, and know its power (guided as it is by the Central Intelligence within) to be capable of anything, from the sending down of a minute spark of instinct into the heart of a flower, to the perpetual manufacture and re-absorption of solar systems by the million million. And it is a circle that ever widens without end. What more glorious manifestation can there be of the Creator's

splendour and wisdom! But as to how this world of ours span round in its own light littleness farther and farther from the Radiant Ring, till its very Sun began to be re-absorbed, and till its Moon disappeared and became a mere picture—till it became of itself like a small blot on the fair scroll of the Universe, while its inhabitants grew to resent all heavenly attraction; and how it was yet thought worth God's patience and tender consideration, just for the sake of a few human souls upon it who still remembered and loved Him, to give it one more chance before it should be drawn back into the Central Circle like a spark within a fire—all this is sufficiently set forth in the words of Heliobas, quoted in the next chapter.



CHAPTER V.

THE ELECTRIC CREED.

THE “Electric Principle of Christianity” opened as follows :

“From all Eternity God, or the *Supreme Spirit of Light*, existed, and to all Eternity He will continue to exist. This is plainly stated in the New Testament thus: ‘God is a *Spirit*, and they that worship Him must worship Him *in spirit* and in truth.’

“He is a Shape of pure Electric Radiance. Those who may be inclined to doubt this may search the Scriptures on which they pin their faith, more par-

ticularly the Testament, and they will find that all the visions and appearances of the Deity there chronicled were electric in character.

“As a poet forms poems, or a musician melodies, so God formed by a Thought the vast Central Sphere in which He dwells, and peopled it with the pure creations of His glorious fancy. And why? Because, being pure Light, He is also pure Love; the power or capacity of Love implies the necessity of Loving; the necessity of loving points to the existence of things to be loved—hence the secret of creation. From the ever-working Intelligence of this Divine Love proceeded the Electric Circle of the Universe, from whence are born all worlds.

“This truth vaguely dawned upon the ancient poets of Scripture when they wrote: ‘Darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved

upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light. And there was light.'

“These words apply *solely* to the creation or production of *our own Earth*, and in them we read nothing but a simple manifestation of electricity, consisting in a *heating passage of rays* from the Central Circle to the planet newly propelled forth from it, which caused that planet to produce and multiply the wonders of the animal, vegetable and mineral kingdoms which we call Nature.

“Let us now turn again to the poet-prophets of Scripture: ‘And God said, Let us make man in our image.’ The word ‘*our*’ here implies an instinctive idea that God was never alone. This idea is correct. Love cannot exist in a chaos; and God by the sheer necessity of His Being has for ever been surrounded by radiant and immortal Spirits emanating from His own creative glory—beings in

whom all beauty and all purity are found. In the *images*, therefore (only the *images*), of these Children of Light and of Himself, He made Man—that is, He caused the Earth to be inhabited and *dominated* by beings composed of Earth's component parts, animal, vegetable and mineral, giving them their superiority by placing within them His '*likeness*' in the form of an *electric flame* or *germ* of spiritual existence combined with its companion working-force of *Will-power*.

“ Like all flames, this electric spark can either be fanned into a fire or it can be allowed to escape in air—*it can never be destroyed*. It can be fostered and educated till it becomes a living Spiritual Form of absolute beauty—an immortal creature of thought, memory, emotion, and working intelligence. If, on the contrary, it is neglected or forgotten, and its companion Will is drawn by the weight of Earth to work for earthly aims alone, then it escapes

and seeks other chances of development in *other forms on other planets*, while the body it leaves, *supported only by physical sustenance drawn from the Earth on which it dwells*, becomes a mere lump of clay *animated by mere animal life solely*, full of inward ignorance and corruption and outward incapacity. Of such material are the majority of men composed *by their own free-will and choice*, because they habitually deaden the voice of conscience and refuse to believe in the existence of a spiritual element within and around them.

“ To resume : the Earth is one of the smallest of planets ; and not only this, but, from its position in the Universe, receives a less amount of direct influence from the Electric Circle than other worlds more happily situated. Were men wise enough to accept this fact, they would foster to the utmost the germs of electric sympathy within themselves, in order to form a direct communication, or system of attraction,

between this planet and the ever-widening Ring, so that some spiritual benefit might accrue to them thereby. But as the ages roll on, their chances of doing this diminish. The time is swiftly approaching when the invincible Law of Absorption shall extinguish Earth as easily as we blow out the flame of a candle. True, it may be again reproduced, and again thrown out on space ; but then it will be in a new and grander form, and will doubtless have more god-like inhabitants.

“ In the meantime—during those brief cycles of centuries which are as a breath in the workings of the Infinite, and which must yet elapse before this world, as we know it, comes to an end—God has taken pity on the few, very few souls dwelling here, pent up in mortal clay, who have blindly tried to reach Him, like plants straining up to the light, and has established a broad stream of sympathetic electric communication with Himself, which

all who care to do so may avail themselves of.

“ Here it may be asked : Why should God take pity ? Because that Supreme Shape of Light finds a portion of Himself in all pure souls that love Him, and *He cannot despise Himself*. Also, because He is capable of all the highest emotions known to man, in a far larger and grander degree, besides possessing other sentiments and desires unimaginal to the human mind. It is enough to say that all the attributes that accompany perfect goodness He enjoys ; therefore He can feel compassion, tenderness, forgiveness, patience—all or any of the emotions that produce pure, unselfish pleasure.

“ Granting Him, therefore, these attributes (and it is both blasphemous and unreasonable to *deny Him those virtues which distinguish the best of men*), it is easily understood how He, the All-Fair Beneficent Ruler of the Central Sphere,

perceiving the long distance to which the Earth was propelled, like a ball flung too far out, from the glory of His Electric Ring, saw also that the creatures He had made in His image were in danger of crushing that image completely out, and with it all remembrance of Him, in the fatal attention they gave to their merely earthly surroundings, lacking, as they did, and not possessing sufficient energy to seek, electric attraction. In brief, this Earth and God's World were like America and Europe before the Atlantic Cable was laid. Now the messages of goodwill flash under the waves, heedless of the storms. So also God's Cable is laid between us and His Heaven in the person of Christ.

“For ages (always remembering that our ages are with God a moment) the idea of *worship* was in the mind of man. With this idea came also the sentiment of *propitiation*. The untamed savage has from time immemorial instinctively felt the

necessity of looking up to a Being greater than himself, and also of seeking a reconciliation with that Being for some fault or loss in himself which he is aware of, yet cannot explain. This double instinct—worship and propitiation—is the keynote of all the creeds of the world, and may be called God's first thought of the cable to be hereafter laid—a lightning-thought which He instilled into the human race to prepare it, as one might test a telegraph-wire from house to house, before stretching it across a continent.

“ All religions, as known to us, are mere types of Christianity. It is a notable fact that some of the oldest and most learned races in the world, such as the Armenians and Chaldeans, were the first to be convinced of the truth of Christ's visitation. Buddhism, of which there are so many million followers, is itself a type of Christ's teaching; only it lacks the supernatural element. Buddha died a hermit at the age

of eighty, as any wise and ascetic man might do to-day. The death and resurrection of Christ were widely different. Anyone can be a Buddha again ; anyone can *not* be a Christ. That there are stated to be more followers of Buddhism than of Christianity is no proof of any efficacy in the former or lack of power in the latter. Buddhists help to swell that very large class of persons who prefer a flattering picture to a plain original ; or who, sheep-like by nature, finding themselves all together in one meadow, are too lazy, as well as too indifferent, to seek pastures fresher and fairer.

“ Through the divine influence of an Electric Thought, then, the world unconsciously grew to expect *something*—they knew not what. The old creeds of the world, like sunflowers, turned towards that unknown Sun ; the poets, prophets, seers, all spoke of some approaching consolation and glory ; and to this day the fated

Jews expect it, unwilling to receive as their Messiah the Divine Martyr they slew, though their own Scriptures testify to His identity.

“ Christ came, born of a Virgin ; that is, a radiant angel from God’s Sphere was in the first place sent down to Earth to wear the form of Mary of Bethlehem, in Judea. Within that vessel of absolute purity God placed an Emanation of His own radiance—no germ or small flame such as is given to us in our bodies to cultivate and foster, but a complete immortal Spirit, a portion of God Himself, wise, sinless, and strong. This Spirit, pent up in clay, was born as a helpless babe, grew up as man—as man taught, comforted, was slain and buried ; but as pure Spirit rose again and returned in peace to Heaven, His mission done.

“ It was necessary, in order to establish what has been called an electric communication between God’s Sphere and this Earth, that an actual immortal, untainted

Spirit in the person of Christ should walk this world, sharing with men sufferings, difficulties, danger, and death. Why? In order that we might first completely confide in and trust Him, afterwards realizing His spiritual strength and glory by His resurrection. And here may be noted the main difference between the Electric Theory of Christianity and other theories. *Christ did not die because God needed a sacrifice.* The idea of sacrifice is a relic of heathen barbarism; God is too infinitely loving to desire the sacrifice of the smallest flower. He is too patient to be ever wrathful; and barbaric ignorance confronts us again in the notion that He should need to be appeased. And the fancy that He should desire Himself or part of Himself to become a sacrifice to Himself has arisen out of the absurd and conflicting opinions of erring humanity, wherein right and wrong are so jumbled together that it is difficult to distinguish one from the other.

Christ's death was not a sacrifice ; it was simply a means of confidence and communion with the Creator. A sinless Spirit suffered to show us how to suffer ; lived on Earth to show us how to live ; prayed to show us how to pray ; died to show us how to die ; rose again to impress strongly upon us that there was in truth a life beyond this one, for which He strove to prepare our souls. Finally, by His re-ascension into Heaven He established that much-needed electric communication between us and the Central Sphere.

“ It can be proved from the statements of the New Testament that in Christ was an Embodied Electric Spirit. From first to last His career was attended by *electric phenomena*, of which eight examples are here quoted ; and earnest students of the matter can find many others if they choose to examine for themselves.

“ 1. The appearance of the Star and the Vision of Angels on the night of His birth.

The Chaldeans saw His 'star in the east,' and they came to worship Him. The Chaldeans were always a learned people, and electricity was an advanced science with them. They at once recognised the star to be no new planet, but simply a star-shaped electric flame flitting through space. They knew what this meant. Observe, too, that they had no doubts upon the point; they came '*to worship Him,*' and provided themselves with gifts to offer to this radiant Guest, the offspring of pure Light. The vision of the angels appearing to the shepherds was simply a joyous band of the Singing Children of the Electric Ring, who out of pure interest and pleasure floated in sight of Earth, drawn thither partly by the already strong attractive influence of the Radiance that was imprisoned there in the form of the Babe of Bethlehem.

"2. When Christ was baptized by John the Baptist, '*the heavens opened.*'

“ 3. The sympathetic influence of Christ was so powerful, that when He selected His disciples, He had but to speak to them, and at the sound of His voice, though they were engaged in other business, ‘*they left all and followed Him.*’

“ 4. Christ’s body was charged with electricity. Thus He was easily able to heal sick and diseased persons by a touch or a look. The woman who caught at His garment in the crowd was cured of her long-standing ailment ; and we see that Christ was aware of His own electric force by the words He used on that occasion : ‘*Who touched Me ? For I feel that some virtue is gone out of Me*’—which is the exact feeling that a physical electrician experiences at this day after employing his powers on a subject. The raising of Jairus’s daughter, of the widow’s son at Nain, and of Lazarus, were all accomplished by the same means.

“ 5. The walking on the sea was a

purely electric effort, *and can be accomplished now by anyone* who has cultivated sufficient inner force. The sea being full of electric particles will support anybody sufficiently and similarly charged—the two currents combining to procure the necessary equilibrium. Peter, who was able to walk a little way, lost his power directly his will became vanquished by fear—because the sentiment of fear disperses electricity, and being a purely *human* emotion, does away with spiritual strength for the time.

“6. The Death of Christ was attended by electric manifestations—by the darkness over the land during the Crucifixion; the tearing of the temple veil in twain; and the earthquake which finally ensued.

“7. The Resurrection was a most powerful display of electric force. It will be remembered that the angel who was found sitting at the entrance of the empty sepulchre ‘had a countenance like *light-*

ning,' i.e. like electric flame. It must also be called to mind how the risen Christ addressed Mary Magdalene: '*Touch Me not, for I am but newly risen!*' Why should she not have touched Him? Simply because His strength then was the strength of concentrated in-rushing currents of electricity; and to touch Him at that moment would have been for Magdalene instant death by lightning. This effect of embodied electric force has been shadowed forth in the Greek legends of Apollo, whose glory consumed at a breath the mortal who dared to look upon him.

"8. The descent of the Holy Ghost, by which term is meant an ever-flowing current of the inspired working Intelligence of the Creator, was purely electric in character: '*Suddenly there came a sound from Heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and sat*

upon each of them.’ It may here be noted that the natural electric flame is *dual* or ‘cloven’ in shape.

“Let us now take the Creed as accepted to-day by the Christian Church, and see how thoroughly it harmonizes with the discoveries of spiritual electricity. ‘I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things *visible and invisible.*’ This is a brief and simple description of the Creator as He exists—a Supreme Centre of Light, out of whom *must* spring all life, all love, all wisdom.

“‘And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages.’ This means that the only absolute Emanation of His own *personal* Radiance that ever wore such mean garb as our clay was found in Christ—who, as part of God, certainly existed ‘*before all ages.*’ For as the Creed itself says, He was ‘God of God, LIGHT OF

LIGHT.' Then we go on through the circumstances of Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection, and our profession of faith brings us to 'I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of Life, who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,' etc. This, as already stated, means that we believe that since Christ ascended into Heaven, our electric communication with the Creator has been established, and an ever-flowing current of divine inspiration is turned beneficially in the direction of our Earth, 'proceeding from the Father and the Son.' We admit in the Creed that this inspiration manifested itself before Christ came and '*spake by the prophets*;' but, as before stated, this only happened at rare and difficult intervals, while now Christ Himself speaks through those who most strongly adhere to His teachings.

"It may here be mentioned that few seem to grasp the fact of the *special message to women* intended to be conveyed in the

person of the Virgin Mary. She was actually one of the radiant Spirits of the Central Sphere, imprisoned by God's will in woman's form. After the birth of Christ, she was still kept on Earth, to follow His career to the end. There was a secret understanding between Himself and her. As, for instance, when she found Him among the doctors of the law, she for one moment suffered her humanity to get the better of her in anxious inquiries; and His reply, 'Why sought ye Me? Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?' was a sort of reminder to her, which she at once accepted. Again, at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, when Christ turned the water into wine, He said to His mother, '*Woman*, what have I to do with thee?' which meant simply: What have I to do with thee as *woman* merely?—which was another reminder to her of her spiritual origin, causing her at once to address the servants who stood by as

follows : ' Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.' And why, it may be asked, if Mary was really an imprisoned immortal Spirit, sinless and joyous, should she be forced to suffer all the weaknesses, sorrows, and anxieties of any ordinary woman and mother? *Simply as an example to women* who are the mothers of the human race ; and who, being thus laid under a heavy responsibility, need sympathetic guidance. Mary's life teaches women that the virtues they need are—obedience, purity, meekness, patience, long-suffering, modesty, self-denial, and endurance. She loved to hold a secondary position ; she placed herself in willing subjection to Joseph—a man of austere and simple life, advanced in years, and weighted with the cares of a family by a previous marriage—who wedded her by *an influence which compelled him* to become her protector in the eyes of the world. Out of these facts, simple as they are, can be drawn the secret of happiness for women—

a secret and a lesson that, if learned by heart, would bring them and those they love out of storm and bewilderment into peace and safety.

“For those who have once become aware of the existence of the Central Sphere and of the Electric Ring surrounding it, and who are able to realize to the full the gigantic as well as minute work performed by the electric waves around us and within us, there can no longer be any doubt as to all the facts of Christianity, as none of them, viewed by the electric theory, are otherwise than in accordance with the Creator’s love and sympathy with even the smallest portion of His creation.

“Why then, if Christianity be a Divine Truth, are not all people Christians? As well ask, if music and poetry are good things, why all men are not poets and musicians. Art seeks art; in like manner God seeks God—that is, He seeks portions of His own essence among His creatures.

Christ Himself said, 'Many are called, but few are chosen;' and it stands to reason that very few souls will succeed in becoming pure enough to enter the Central Sphere without hindrance. Many, on leaving Earth, will be detained in the Purgatory of Air, where thousands of spirits work for ages, watching over others, helping and warning others, and in this unselfish labour succeed in raising themselves, little by little, higher and ever higher, till they at last reach the longed-for goal. It must also be remembered that not only from Earth but from *all worlds*, released souls seek to attain final happiness in the Central Sphere where God is; so that, however great the number of those that are permitted to proceed thither from this little planet, they can only form, as it were, one drop in a mighty ocean.

“ It has been asked whether the Electric Theory of Christianity includes the doctrine of Hell, or a place of perpetual punishment.

Eternal Punishment is merely a form of speech for what is really Eternal Retrogression. For as there is a Forward, so there must be a Backward. The electric germ of the Soul—delicate, fiery, and imperishable as it is—can be forced by its companion Will to take refuge in a lower form of material existence, dependent on the body it first inhabits. For instance, a man who is obstinate in pursuing *active evil* can so retrograde the progress of any spiritual life within him, that it shall lack the power to escape, as it might do, from merely lymphatic and listless temperaments, to seek some other chance of development, but shall sink into the forms of quadrupeds, birds, and other creatures dominated by purely physical needs. But there is one thing it can never escape from—*Memory*. And in that faculty is constituted Hell. So that if a man, by choice, forces his soul *downward* to inhabit hereafter the bodies of dogs, horses, and other like animals, he

should know that he does so at the cost of everything except Remembrance. Eternal Retrogression means that the hopelessly tainted electric germ recoils further and further from the Pure Centre whence it sprang, *always bearing within itself* the knowledge of *what it was once* and *what it might have been*. There is pathetic meaning in the eyes of a dog or a seal ; in the melancholy, patient gaze of the oxen toiling at the plough ; there is an unuttered warning in the silent faces of flowers ; there is more tenderness of regret in the voice of the nightingale than love ; and in the wild upward soaring of the lark, with its throat full of passionate, shouting prayer, there is shadowed forth the yearning hope that dies away in despair as the bird sinks to earth again, his instincts not half satisfied. There is no greater torture than to be compelled to remember, in suffering, joys and glorious opportunities gone for ever.

“ Regarding the Electric Theory of

Religion, it is curious to observe how the truth of it has again and again been dimly shadowed forth in the prophecies of Art, Science, and Poesy. The old painters who depicted a halo of light round the head of their Virgins and Saints did so out of a correct impulse which they did not hesitate to obey.* The astronomers who, after years of profound study, have been enabled to measure the flames of the burning sun, and to find out that these are from two to four thousand miles high, are nearly arrived at the conclusion that it is a world in a state of conflagration, in which they will be perfectly right. Those who hold that this Earth of ours was once self-luminous are also right ; for it was indeed so when first projected from the Electric Ring. The compilers or inventors of the 'Arabian Nights' also hit upon a truth when they

* An impulse which led them vaguely to foresee, though not to explain, the electric principle of spiritual life.

described human beings as forced through evil influence to take the forms of lower animals—a truth just explained in the Law of Retrogression. All art, all prophecy, all poesy, should therefore be accepted eagerly and studied earnestly, for in them we find *electric inspiration*, out of which we are able to draw lessons for our guidance hereafter. The great point that scientists and artists have hitherto failed to discover, is the existence of the Central Sphere and its surrounding Electric Circle. Once realize these two great facts, and all the wonders and mysteries of the Universe are perfectly easy of comprehension.

“ In conclusion, I offer no opinion as to which is Christ’s Church, or the Fountain-head of Spirituality in the world. In all Churches errors have intruded through unworthy and hypocritical members. In a crowded congregation of worshippers there may perhaps be only one or two who are free from self-interest and personal vanity.

In Sectarianism, for instance, there is no shred of Christianity. Lovers of God and followers of Christ must, in the first place, have perfect Unity; and the bond uniting them must be an *electric* one of love and faith. No true Christian should be able to hate, despise, or envy the other. Were I called upon to select among the Churches, I should choose that which has *most electricity* working within it, and which is able to believe in a positive electrical communication between Christ and herself taking place daily on her altars—a Church which holds, as it were, the other end of the telegraphic ray between Earth and the Central Sphere, and which is, therefore, able to exist among the storms of modern opinions, affording refuge and consolation to the few determined travellers who are bound onward and upward. I shall not name the Church I mean, because it is the duty of everyone to examine and find it out for himself or herself. And even though this Church instinctively

works in the right direction, it is full of errors introduced by ignorant and unworthy members—errors which must be carefully examined and cast aside by degrees. But, as I said before, it is the only Church which has the Principles of Electricity within it, and is therefore destined to live, because electricity is life.

“Now I beseech the reader of this manuscript to which I, Heliobas, append my hand and seal, to remember and realize earnestly the following invincible facts: first, that God and His Christ *exist*; secondly, that while the little paltry affairs of our temporal state are being built up as crazily as a child’s house of cards, the huge Central Sphere revolves, and the Electric Ring, strong and indestructible, is ever at its work of production and re-absorption; thirdly, that every thought and word of *every habitant on every planet* is reflected in lightning language before the Creator’s eyes as easily as we receive telegrams;

fourthly, that this world is *the only spot in the Universe* where His existence is actually questioned and doubted. And the general spread of modern positivism, materialism and atheism is one of the most terrific and meaning signs of the times. The work of separating the wheat from the chaff is beginning. Those who love and believe in God and Spiritual Beauty are about to be placed on one side; the millions who worship Self are drawing together in vast opposing ranks on the other; and the moment approaches which is prophesied to be ‘as the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, and shineth even to the other part.’ In other words, the fiery whirlpool of the Ring is nearly ready to absorb our planet in its vortex; and out of all who dwell upon its surface, how many shall reach the glorious Central World of God? Of two men working in the same field, shall it not be as Christ foretold—‘the one shall be taken, and the other left’?

“Friend, Pupil, Reader! Whoever thou art, take heed and foster thine own soul! For know that nothing can hinder the Immortal Germ within us from taking the form imposed upon it by our *Wills*. Through Love and Faith, it can become an Angel, and perform wonders even while in its habitation of clay; through indifference and apathy, it can desert us altogether and for ever; through mockery and blasphemous disbelief, it can sink into even a lower form than that of snake or toad. In our own unfettered hand lies our eternal destiny. Wonderful and terrible responsibility! Who shall dare to say we have no need of prayer?”

This document was signed “Casimir Heliobas,” and bore a seal on which the impression seemed to consist of two Arabic or Sanskrit words, which I could not understand. I put it carefully away with its companion MS. under lock and key, and while I was yet musing earnestly on its

contents, Zara came into my room. She had finished her task in the studio, she said, and she now proposed a drive in the Bois as an agreeable way of passing the rest of the afternoon.

“I want to be as long as possible in your company,” she added, with a caressing sweetness in her manner; “for now your friends have come to Paris, I expect you will soon be leaving us, so I must have as much of you as I can.”

My heart sank at the thought of parting from her, and I looked wistfully at her lovely face. Leo had followed her in from the studio, and seemed still very melancholy.

“We shall always be good friends, Zara dearest,” I said, “shall we not? Close, fond friends, like sisters?”

“Sisters are not always fond of each other,” remarked Zara, half gaily. “And you know ‘there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother’!”

“And what friend is that in *your* case?” I asked, half jestingly, half curiously.

“Death!” she replied with a strange smile, in which there was both pathos and triumph.

I started at her unexpected reply, and a kind of foreboding chilled my blood. I endeavoured, however, to speak cheerfully as I said:

“Why, of course, death sticks more closely to us than any friend or relative. But you look fitter to receive the embraces of life than of death, Zara.”

“They are both one and the same thing,” she answered; “or rather, the one leads to the other. But do not let us begin to philosophize. Put on your things and come. The carriage is waiting.”

I readily obeyed her, and we enjoyed an exhilarating drive together. The rest of the day passed with us all very pleasantly, and our conversation had principally to do with the progress of art and literature in

many lands, and maintained itself equably on the level of mundane affairs. Among other things, we spoke of the Spanish violinist Sarasate, and I amused Heliobas by quoting him some of the criticisms of the London daily papers on this great artist, such as, "*He plays pieces which, though adapted to show his wonderful skill, are the veriest clap-trap;*" "*He lacks breadth and colour;*" "*A true type of the artist virtuoso,*" etc., etc.

"Half these people do not know in the least what they mean by '*breadth and colour*' or '*virtuosity*,'" said Heliobas, with a smile. "They think emotion, passion, all true sentiment combined with extraordinary *technique*, must be 'clap-trap.' Now the Continent of Europe acknowledges Pablo de Sarasate as the first violinist living, and London would not be London unless it could thrust an obtuse opposing opinion in the face of the Continent. England is the last country in the

world to accept anything new. Its people are tired and *blasé*; like highly trained circus-horses, they want to trot or gallop always in the old grooves. It will always be so. Sarasate is like a brilliant meteor streaming across their narrow bit of the heaven of music; they stare, gape, and think it is an unnatural phenomenon—a ‘virtuosity’ in the way of meteors, which they are afraid to accept lest it set them on fire. What would you? The meteor shines and burns; it is always a meteor!”

So, talking lightly, and gliding from subject to subject, the hours wore away, and we at last separated for the night.

I shall always be glad to remember how tenderly Zara kissed me and wished me good repose; and I recall now, with mingled pain, wonder, and gratitude, how perfectly calm and contented I felt as, after my prayers, I sank to sleep, unwarned, and therefore happily unconscious, of what awaited me on the morrow.



CHAPTER VI.

DEATH BY LIGHTNING.

THE morning of the next day dawned rather gloomily. A yellowish fog obscured the air, and there was a closeness and sultriness in the atmosphere that was strange for that wintry season. I had slept well, and rose with the general sense of ease and refreshment that I always experienced since I had been under the treatment of Heliobas. Those whose unhappy physical condition causes them to awake from uneasy slumber feeling almost more fatigued than when they retired to rest, can scarcely

have any idea of the happiness it engenders to open untired, glad eyes with the morning light ; to feel the very air a nourishment ; to stand with lithe, rested limbs in the bath of cool, pure water, finding that limpid element obediently adding its quota to the vigour of perfect health ; to tingle from head to foot with the warm current of life running briskly through the veins, making the heart merry, the brain clear, and all the powers of body and mind in active working condition. This is indeed most absolute enjoyment. Add to it the knowledge of the existence of one's own inner Immortal Spirit—the beautiful germ of Light in the fostering of which no labour is ever taken in vain—the living, wondrous thing that is destined to watch an eternity of worlds bloom and fade to bloom again, like flowers, while itself, superior to them all, shall become ever more strong and radiant—with these surroundings and prospects, who shall say life is not worth living ?

Dear Life ! sweet Moment ! gracious Opportunity ! brief Journey so well worth the taking ! gentle Exile so well worth enduring !—thy bitterest sorrows are but blessings in disguise ; thy sharpest pains are brought upon us by ourselves, and even then are turned to warnings for our guidance ; while above us, through us, and around us radiates the Supreme Love, unalterably tender !

These thoughts, and others like them, all more or less conducive to cheerfulness, occupied me till I had finished dressing. Melancholy was now no part of my nature, otherwise I might have been depressed by the appearance of the weather and the murkiness of the air. But since I learned the simple secrets of physical electricity, atmospheric influences have had no effect upon the equable poise of my temperament—a fact for which I cannot be too grateful, seeing how many of my fellow-creatures permit themselves to be affected by changes

in the wind, intense heat, intense cold, or other things of the like character.

I went down to breakfast, singing softly on my way, and I found Zara already seated at the head of her table, while Heliobas was occupied in reading and sorting a pile of letters that lay beside his plate. Both greeted me with their usual warmth and heartiness.

During the repast, however, the brother and sister were strangely silent, and once or twice I fancied that Zara's eyes filled with tears, though she smiled again so quickly and radiantly that I felt I was mistaken.

A piece of behaviour on the part of Leo, too, filled me with dismay. He had been lying quietly at his master's feet for some time, when he suddenly arose, sat upright, and, lifting his nose in air, uttered a most prolonged and desolate howl. Anything more thoroughly heart-broken and despairing than that cry I have never heard. After he had concluded it, the poor animal

seemed ashamed of what he had done, and, creeping meekly along, with drooping head and tail, he kissed his master's hand, then mine, and lastly Zara's. Finally, he went into a distant corner and lay down again, as if his feelings were altogether too much for him.

“Is he ill?” I asked pityingly.

“I think not,” replied Heliobas. “The weather is peculiar to-day — close, and almost thunderous; dogs are very susceptible to such changes.”

At that moment the page entered bearing a silver salver, on which lay a letter, which he handed to his master and immediately retired.

Heliobas opened and read it.

“Ivan regrets he cannot dine with us to-day,” he said, glancing at his sister; “he is otherwise engaged. He says, however, that he hopes to have the pleasure of looking in during the latter part of the evening.”

Zara inclined her head gently, and made no other reply.

A few seconds afterwards we rose from table, and Zara, linking her arm through mine, said :

“ I want to have a talk with you while we can be alone. Come to my room.”

We went upstairs together, followed by the wise yet doleful Leo, who seemed determined not to let his mistress out of his sight. When we arrived at our destination, Zara pushed me gently into an easy-chair, and seated herself in another one opposite.

“ I am going to ask a favour of you,” she began ; “ because I know you will do anything to please me or Casimir. Is it not so ?”

I assured her she might rely upon my observing with the truest fidelity any request of hers, small or great.

She thanked me and resumed :

“ You know I have been working secretly in my studio for some time past.

I have been occupied in the execution of two designs—one is finished, and is intended as a gift to Casimir. The other”—she hesitated—“is incomplete. It is the colossal figure which was veiled when you first came in to see my little statue of ‘*Evening*.’ I made an attempt beyond my powers—in short, I cannot carry out the idea to my satisfaction. Now, dear, pay great attention to what I say. I have reason to believe that I shall be compelled to take a sudden journey—promise me that when I am gone you will see that unfinished statue completely destroyed—demolished into powder.”

I could not answer her for a minute or two, I was so surprised by her words.

“Going on a journey, Zara?” I said. “Well, if you are, I suppose you will soon return home again; and why should your statue be destroyed in the meantime? You may yet be able to bring it to final perfection.”

Zara shook her head and smiled half sadly.

“ I told you it was a favour I had to ask of you,” she said ; “ and now you are unwilling to grant it.”

“ I am not unwilling—believe me, dearest, I would do anything to please you,” I assured her ; “ but it seems so strange to me that you should wish the result of your labour destroyed, simply because you are going on a journey.”

“ Strange as it seems, I desire it most earnestly,” said Zara ; “ otherwise—but if you will not see it done for me, I must preside at the work of demolition myself, though I frankly confess it would be most painful to me.”

I interrupted her.

“ Say no more, Zara !” I exclaimed ; “ I will do as you wish. When you are gone, you say——”

“ When I am gone,” repeated Zara firmly, “ and before you yourself leave this

house, you will see that particular statue destroyed. You will thus do me a very great service."

"Well," I said, "and when are you coming back again? Before I leave Paris?"

"I hope so—I think so," she replied evasively; "at any rate, we shall meet again soon."

"Where are you going?" I asked.

She smiled. Such a lovely, glad, and triumphant smile!

"You will know my destination before to-night has passed away," she answered.

"In the meanwhile, I have your promise?"

"Most certainly."

She kissed me, and as she did so, a lurid flash caught my eyes and almost dazzled them. It was a gleam of fiery lustre from the electric jewel she wore.

The day went on its usual course, and the weather seemed to grow murkier every

hour. The air was almost sultry, and when during the afternoon I went into the conservatory to gather some of the glorious Maréchal Niel roses that grew there in such perfection, the intense heat of the place was nearly insupportable. I saw nothing of Heliobas all day, and after the morning, very little of Zara. She disappeared soon after luncheon, and I could not find her in her rooms nor in her studio, though I knocked at the door several times. Leo, too, was missing. After being alone for an hour or more, I thought I would pay a visit to the chapel. But on attempting to carry out this intention I found its doors locked—an unusual circumstance which rather surprised me. Fancying that I heard the sounds of voices within, I paused to listen. But all was profoundly silent. Strolling into the hall, I took up at random from a side-table a little volume of poems, unknown to me, called “Pygmalion in Cyprus;” and seating

myself in one of the luxurious Oriental easy-chairs near the silvery sparkling fountain, I began to read. I opened the book I held at "A Ballad of Kisses," which ran as follows :

- "There are three kisses that I call to mind,
And I will sing their secrets as I go,—
The first, a kiss too courteous to be kind,
Was such a kiss as monks and maidens know,
As sharp as frost, as blameless as the snow.
- "The second kiss, ah God ! I feel it yet,—
And evermore my soul will loathe the same,—
The toys and joys of fate I may forget,
But not the touch of that divided shame ;
It clove my lips—it burnt me like a flame.
- "The third, the final kiss, is one I use
Morning and noon and night, and not amiss.
Sorrow be mine if such I do refuse !
And when I die, be Love enrapt in bliss
Re-sanctified in heaven by such a kiss !"

This little gem, which I read and re-read with pleasure, was only one of many in the same collection. The author was assuredly a man of genius. I studied his word-melodies with intense interest, and noted with some surprise how original and

beautiful were many of his fancies and similes. I say I noted them with surprise, because he was evidently a modern Englishman, and yet unlike any other of his writing species. His name was not Alfred Tennyson, nor Edwin Arnold, nor Matthew Arnold, nor Austin Dobson, nor Martin Tupper. He was neither plagiarist nor translator—he was actually an original man. I do not give his name here, as I consider it the duty of his own country to find him out and acknowledge him, which, as it is so proud of its literary standing, of course it will do in due season. On this, my first introduction to his poems, I became speedily absorbed in them, and was repeating to myself softly a verse which I remember now :

“Hers was sweetest of sweet faces,
Hers the tenderest eyes of all ;
In her hair she had the traces
Of a heavenly coronal,
Bringing sunshine to sad places
Where the sunlight could not fall.’

Then I was startled by the sound of a clock striking six. I bethought myself of the people who were coming to dinner, and decided to go to my room and dress. Replacing the "Pygmalion" book on the table whence I had taken it, I made my way upstairs, thinking as I went of Zara and her strange request, and wondering what journey she was going upon.

I could not come to any satisfactory conclusion on this point; besides, I had a curious disinclination to think about it very earnestly, though the subject kept recurring to my mind. Yet always some inward monitor seemed to assure me, as plainly as though the words were spoken in my ear:

"It is useless for you to consider the reason of this, or the meaning of that. Take things as they come in due order; one circumstance explains the other, and everything is always for the best."

I prepared my Indian crêpe dress for the evening, the same I had worn for Madame

Didier's party at Cannes ; only, instead of having lilies of the valley to ornament it with, I arranged some clusters of the Maréchal Niel roses I had gathered from the conservatory—lovely blossoms, with their dewy pale-gold centres forming perfect cups of delicious fragrance. These, relieved by a few delicate sprays of the maidenhair fern, formed a becoming finish to my simple costume. As I arrayed myself, and looked at my own reflection in the long mirror, I smiled out of sheer gratitude. For health, joyous and vigorous, sparkled in my eyes, glowed on my cheeks, tinted my lips, and rounded my figure. The face that looked back at me from the glass was a perfectly happy one, ready to dimple into glad mirth or bright laughter. No shadow of pain or care remained upon it to remind me of past suffering, and I murmured half aloud : “ Thank God ! ”

“ Amen ! ” said a soft voice, and, turning round, I saw Zara.

But how shall I describe her? No words can adequately paint the glorious beauty in which, that night, she seemed to move as in an atmosphere of her own creating. She wore a clinging robe of the richest, softest white satin, caught in at the waist by a zone of pearls—pearls which, from their size and purity, must have been priceless. Her beautiful neck and arms were bare, and twelve rows of pearls were clasped round her slender throat, supporting in their centre the electric stone, which shone with a soft, subdued radiance, like the light of the young moon. Her rich, dark hair was arranged in its usual fashion—that is, hanging down in one thick plait, which on this occasion was braided in and out with small pearls. On her bosom she wore a magnificent cluster of natural orange-blossoms; and of these, while I gazed admiringly at her, I first spoke:

“You look like a bride, Zara! You

have all the outward signs of one—white satin, pearls, and orange-blossoms !”

She smiled.

“ They are the first cluster that has come out in our conservatory,” she said ; “ and I could not resist them. As for the pearls, they belonged to my mother, and are my favourite ornaments ; and white satin is now no longer exclusively for brides. How soft and pretty that Indian crêpe is ! Your toilette is charming, and suits you to perfection. Are you quite ready ?”

“ Quite,” I answered.

She hesitated and sighed. Then she raised her lovely eyes with a sort of wistful tenderness.

“ Before we go down I should like you to kiss me once,” she said.

I embraced her fondly, and our lips met with a lingering sisterly caress.

“ You will never forget me, will you ?” she asked almost anxiously ; “ never cease to think of me kindly ?”

“How fanciful you are to-night, Zara dear!” I said. “As if I *could* forget you! I shall always think of you as the loveliest and sweetest woman in the world.”

“And when I am out of the world—what then?” she pursued.

Remembering her spiritual sympathies, I answered at once :

“Even then I shall know you to be one of the fairest of the angels. So you see, Zara darling, I shall always love you.”

“I think you will,” she said meditatively ; “you are one of us. But come! I hear voices downstairs. I think our expected guests have arrived, and we must be in the drawing-room to receive them. Good-bye, little friend!” And she again kissed me.

“Good-bye!” I repeated in astonishment ; “why ‘good-bye’?”

“Because it is my fancy to say the word,” she replied with quiet firmness. “Again, dear little friend, good-bye!”

I felt bewildered, but she would not give me time to utter another syllable. She took my hand and hurried me with her downstairs, and in another moment we were both in the drawing-room, receiving and saying polite nothings to the Everards and Challoners, who had all arrived together, resplendent in evening costume. Amy Everard, I thought, looked a little tired and fagged, though she rejoiced in a superb "arrangement" by Worth of ruby velvet and salmon-pink. But, though a perfect dress is consoling to most women, there are times when even that fails of its effect; and then Worth ceases to loom before the feminine eye as a sort of demi-god, but dwindles insignificantly to the level of a mere tailor, whose prices are ruinous. And this, I think, was the state of mind in which Mrs. Everard found herself that evening; or else she was a trifle jealous of Zara's harmonious grace and loveliness. Be this as it may, she was irritable,

and whisperingly found fault with me for being in such good health.

“You will have too much colour if you don’t take care,” she said almost pettishly, “and nothing is so unfashionable.”

“I know!” I replied with due meekness. “It is very bad style to be quite well—it is almost improper.”

She looked at me, and a glimmering smile lighted her features. But she would not permit herself to become good-humoured, and she furled and unfurled her fan of pink ostrich feathers with some impatience.

“Where did that child get all those pearls from?” she next inquired, with a gesture of her head towards Zara.

“They belonged to her mother,” I answered, smiling as I heard Zara called a *child*, knowing, as I did, her real age.

“She is actually wearing a small fortune on her person,” went on Amy; “I wonder her brother allows her. Girls never under-

stand the value of things of that sort. They should be kept for her till she is old enough to appreciate them."

I made no reply ; I was absorbed in watching Heliobas, who at that moment entered the room accompanied by Father Paul. He greeted his guests with warmth and unaffected heartiness, and all present were, I could see, at once fascinated by the dignity of his presence and the charm of his manner. To an uninstructed eye there was nothing unusual about him ; but to me there was a change in his expression which, as it were, warned and startled me. A deep shadow of anxiety in his eyes made them look more sombre and less keen ; his smile was not so sweet as it was stern, and there was an undefinable *something* in his very bearing that suggested—what ? Defiance ? Yes, defiance ; and it was this which, when I had realized it, curiously alarmed me. For what had he, Heliobas, to do with even the thought of defiance ? Did not all

his power come from the knowledge of the necessity of obedience to the spiritual powers within and without? Quick as light the words spoken to me by Azùl regarding him came back to my remembrance: "Even as he is my Beloved, so let him not fail to hear my voice." What if he *should* fail? A kind of instinct came upon me that some immediate danger of this threatened him, and I braced myself up to a firm determination that, if this was so, I, out of my deep gratitude to him, would do my utmost best to warn him in time. While these thoughts possessed me, the hum of gay conversation went on, and Zara's bright laughter ever and again broke like music on the air. Father Paul, too, proved himself to be of quite a festive and jovial disposition, for he made himself agreeable to Mrs. Challoner and her daughters, and entertained them with the ease and *bonhomie* of an accomplished courtier and man of the world.

Dinner was announced in the usual way—that is, with the sound of music played by the electric instrument devoted to that purpose, a performance which elicited much admiration from all the guests. Heliobas led the way into the dining-room with Mrs. Everard; Colonel Everard followed, with Zara on one arm and the eldest Miss Challoner on the other; Mr. Challoner and myself came next; and Father Paul, with Mrs. Challoner and her other daughter Effie, brought up the rear. There was a universal murmur of surprise and delight as the dinner-table came in view; and its arrangement was indeed a triumph of art. In the centre was placed a large round of crystal in imitation of a lake, and on this apparently floated a beautiful gondola steered by the figure of a gondolier, both exquisitely wrought in fine Venetian glass. The gondola was piled high with a cargo of roses; but the wonder of it all was, that the whole design was

lit up by electricity. Electric sparkles, like drops of dew, shone on the leaves of the flowers; the gondola was lit from end to end with electric stars, which were reflected with prismatic brilliancy in the crystal below; the gondolier's long pole glittered with what appeared to be drops of water tinged by the moonlight, but which was really an electric wire, and in his cap flashed an electric diamond. The whole ornament scintillated and glowed like a marvellous piece of curiously contrived jewel-work. And this was not all. Beside every guest at table a slender vase, shaped like a long-stemmed Nile lily, held roses and ferns, in which were hidden tiny electric stars, causing the blossoms to shine with a transparent and almost fairy-like lustre.

Four graceful youths, clad in the Armenian costume, stood waiting silently round the table till all present were seated, and then they commenced the business of

serving the viands, with swift and noiseless dexterity. As soon as the soup was handed round, tongues were loosened, and the Challoners, who had been gazing at everything in almost open-mouthed astonishment, began to relieve their feelings by warm expressions of unqualified admiration, in which Colonel and Mrs. Everard were not slow to join.

“I do say, and I will say, this beats all I’ve ever seen,” said good Mrs. Challoner as she bent to examine the glittering vase of flowers near her plate. “And this is real electric light? And is it perfectly harmless?”

Heliobas smilingly assured her of the safety of his table decorations.

“Electricity,” he said, “though the most powerful of masters, is the most docile of slaves. It is capable of the smallest as well as of the greatest uses. It can give with equal certainty life or death; in fact, it is the key-note of creation.”

“Is that your theory, sir?” asked Colonel Everard.

“It is not only my theory,” answered Heliobas, “it is a truth, indisputable and unalterable, to those who have studied the mysteries of electric science.”

“And do you base all your medical treatment on this principle?” pursued the Colonel.

“Certainly. Your young friend here, who came to me from Cannes, looking as if she had but a few months to live, can bear witness to the efficacy of my method.”

Every eye was now turned upon me, and I looked up and laughed.

“Do you remember, Amy,” I said, addressing Mrs. Everard, “how you told me I looked like a sick nun at Cannes? What do I look like now?”

“You look as if you had never been ill in your life,” she replied.

“I was going to say,” remarked Mr. Challoner in his deliberate manner, “that

you remind me very much of a small painting of Diana that I saw in the Louvre the other day. You have the same sort of elasticity in your movements, and the same bright healthy eyes."

I bowed, still smiling. "I did not know you were such a flatterer, Mr. Challoner! Diana thanks you!"

The conversation now became general, and turned, among other subjects, upon the growing reputation of Raffaello Cellini.

"What surprises me in that young man," said Colonel Everard, "is his colouring. It is simply marvellous. He was amiable enough to present me with a little landscape scene; and the effect of light upon it is so powerfully done that you would swear the sun was actually shining through it."

The fine sensitive mouth of Heliobas curved in a somewhat sarcastic smile.

"Mere trickery, my dear sir—a piece of clap-trap," he said lightly. "That is what

would be said of such pictures—in England at least. And it *will* be said by many oracular long-established newspapers, while Cellini lives. As soon as he is dead—ah! *c'est autre chose!*—he will then most probably be acknowledged the greatest master of the age. There may even be a Cellini ‘School of Colouring,’ where a select company of daubers will profess to know the secret that has died with him. It is the way of the world!”

Mr. Challoner’s rugged face showed signs of satisfaction, and his shrewd eyes twinkled.

“Right you are, sir!” he said, holding up his glass of wine. “I drink to you! Sir, I agree with you! I calculate there’s a good many worlds flying round in space, but a more ridiculous, feeble-minded, contrary sort of world than this one, I defy any archangel to find!”

Heliobas laughed, nodded, and after a slight pause resumed :

“It is astonishing to me that people do not see to what an infinite number of uses they could put the little re-discovery they have made of *luminous paint*. In that simple thing there is a secret, which as yet they do not guess—a wonderful, beautiful, scientific secret, which may perhaps take them a few hundred years to find out. In the meantime they have got hold of one end of the thread; they can make luminous paint, and with it they can paint light-houses, and, what is far more important—ships. Vessels in mid-ocean will have no more need of fog-signals and different-coloured lamps; their own coat of paint will be sufficient to light them safely on their way. Even rooms can be so painted as to be perfectly luminous at night. A friend of mine, residing in Italy, has a luminous ball-room, where the ceiling is decorated with a moon and stars in electric light. The effect is exceedingly lovely; and though people think a great

deal of money must have been laid out upon it, it is perhaps the only great ball-room in Italy that has been really cheaply fitted up. But, as I said before, there is another secret behind the invention or discovery of luminous paint—a secret which, when once unveiled, will revolutionize all the schools of art in the world.”

“Do you know this secret?” asked Mrs. Challoner.

“Yes, madame—perfectly.”

“Then why don’t you disclose it for the benefit of everybody?” demanded Effie Challoner.

“Because, my dear young lady, no one would believe me if I did. The time is not yet ripe for it. The world must wait till its people are better educated.”

“Better educated!” exclaimed Mrs. Everard. “Why, there is nothing talked of nowadays but education and progress! The very children are wiser than their parents!”

“The children!” returned Heliobas, half inquiringly, half indignantly. “At the rate things are going, there will soon be no children left; they will all be tired little old men and women before they are in their teens. The very babes will be born old. Many of them are being brought up without any faith in God or religion; the result will be an increase of vice and crime. The purblind philosophers, miscalled wise men, who teach the children by the light of poor human reason only, and do away with faith in spiritual things, are bringing down upon the generations to come an unlooked-for and most terrific curse. Childhood, the happy, innocent, sweet, unthinking, almost angelic age, at which Nature would have us believe in fairies and all the delicate aërial fancies of poets, who are, after all, the only true sages—childhood, I say, is being gradually stamped out under the cruel iron heel of the Period—a period not of wisdom, health, or beauty, but one

of drunken delirium, in which the world rushes feverishly along, its eyes fixed on one hard, glittering, stony-featured idol—Gold. Education! Is it education to teach the young that their chances of happiness depend on being richer than their neighbours? Yet that is what it all tends to. Get on!—be successful! Trample on others, but push forward yourself! Money, money!—let its chink be your music; let its yellow shine be fairer than the eyes of love or friendship! Let its piles accumulate and ever accumulate! There are beggars in the streets, but they are humbugs; there is poverty in many places, but why seek to relieve it? Why lessen the sparkling heaps of gold by so much as a coin? Accumulate and ever accumulate! Live so, and then—die! And then—who knows what then?”

His voice had been full of ringing eloquence as he spoke, but at these last words it sank into a low, thrilling tone of

solemnity and earnestness. We all looked at him, fascinated by his manner, and were silent.

Mr. Challoner was the first to break the impressive pause.

“I’m not a speaker, sir,” he observed slowly, “but I’ve got a good deal of feeling somewheres; and you’ll allow me to say that I feel your words—I think they’re right true. I’ve often wanted to say what you’ve said, but haven’t seen my way clear to it. Anyhow, I’ve had a very general impression about me that what we call Society has of late years been going, per express service, direct to the devil—if the ladies will excuse me for plain speaking. And as the journey is being taken by choice and free-will, I suppose there’s no hindrance or stoppage possible. Besides, it’s a downward line, and curiously free from obstructions.”

“Bravo, John!” exclaimed Mrs. Challoner. “You are actually coming out! I

never heard you indulge in similes before."

"Well, my dear," returned her husband, somewhat gratified, "better late than never. A simile is a good thing if it isn't overcrowded. For instance, Mr. Swinburne's similes are laid on too thick sometimes. There is a verse of his which, with all my admiration for him, I never could quite fathom. It is where he earnestly desires to be as '*any leaf of any tree*;' or, failing that, he wouldn't mind becoming '*as bones under the deep, sharp sea*.' I tried hard to see the point of that, but couldn't fix it."

We all laughed. Zara, I thought, was especially merry, and looked her loveliest. She made an excellent hostess, and exerted herself to the utmost to charm—an effort in which she easily succeeded.

The shadow on the face of her brother had not disappeared, and once or twice I noticed that Father Paul looked at him with a certain kindly anxiety.

The dinner approached its end. The dessert, with its luxurious dishes of rare fruit, such as peaches, plantains, hothouse grapes, and even strawberries, was served, and with it a delicious sparkling topaz-tinted wine of Eastern origin called Krüla, which was poured out to us in Venetian glass goblets, wherein lay diamond-like lumps of ice. The air was so exceedingly oppressive that evening that we found this beverage most refreshing. When Zara's goblet was filled, she held it up smiling, and said :

“ I have a toast to propose.”

“ Hear, hear !” murmured the gentlemen, Heliobas excepted.

“ To our next merry meeting !” and as she said this she kissed the rim of the cup, and made a sign as though wafting it towards her brother.

He started as if from a reverie, seized his glass, and drained off its contents to the last drop.

Everyone responded with heartiness to Zara's toast, and then Colonel Everard proposed the health of the fair hostess, which was drunk with enthusiasm.

After this Zara gave the signal, and all the ladies rose to adjourn to the drawing-room. As I passed Heliobas on my way out, he looked so sombre and almost threatening of aspect, that I ventured to whisper :

“ Remember Azùl !”

“ She has forgotten *me* !” he muttered.

“ Never — never !” I said earnestly. “ Oh, Heliobas ! what is wrong with you ?”

He made no answer, and there was no opportunity to say more, as I had to follow Zara. But I felt very anxious, though I scarcely knew why, and I lingered at the door and glanced back at him. As I did so, a low, rumbling sound, like chariot-wheels rolling afar off, broke suddenly on our ears.

“Thunder,” remarked Mr. Challoner quietly. “I thought we should have it. It has been unnaturally warm all day. A good storm will clear the air.”

In my brief backward look at Heliobas, I noted that when that far-distant thunder sounded, he grew very pale. Why? He was certainly not one to have any dread of a storm—he was absolutely destitute of fear. I went into the drawing-room with a hesitating step—my instincts were all awake and beginning to warn me, and I murmured softly a prayer to that strong, invisible majestic spirit which I knew must be near me—my guardian angel. I was answered instantly—my foreboding grew into a positive certainty that some danger menaced Heliobas, and that if I desired to be his friend, I must be prepared for an emergency. Receiving this, as all such impressions should be received, as a direct message sent me for my guidance, I grew calmer, and braced up my energies to

oppose *something*, though I knew not what.

Zara was showing her lady-visitors a large album of Italian photographs, and explaining them as she turned the leaves. As I entered the room, she said eagerly to me :

“ Play to us, dear ! Something soft and plaintive. We all delight in your music, you know.”

“ Did you hear the thunder just now ?” I asked irrelevantly.

“ It *was* thunder ? . I thought so !” said Mrs. Everard. “ Oh, I do hope there is not going to be a storm ! I am so afraid of a storm !”

“ You are nervous ?” questioned Zara kindly, as she engaged her attention with some very fine specimens among the photographs, consisting of views from Venice.

“ Well, I suppose I am,” returned Amy, half laughing. “ Yet I am plucky about

most things, too. Still I don't like to hear the elements quarrelling together—they are too much in earnest about it—and no person can pacify them.”

Zara smiled, and gently repeated her request to me for some music—a request in which Mrs. Challoner and her daughters eagerly joined. As I went to the piano I thought of Edgar Allen Poe's exquisite poem :

“ In Heaven a spirit doth dwell,
Whose heart-strings are a lute ;
None sing so wildly well
As the angel Israfel,
And the giddy stars, so legends tell,
Ceasing their hymns, attend the spell
Of his voice—all mute.”

As I poised my fingers above the keys of the instrument, another long, low, ominous roll of thunder swept up from the distance and made the room tremble.

“ Play—play, for goodness' sake !” exclaimed Mrs. Everard ; “ and then we shall

not be obliged to fix our attention on the approaching storm !”

I played a few soft opening arpeggio passages, while Zara seated herself in an easy-chair near the window, and the other ladies arranged themselves on sofas and ottomans to their satisfaction. The room was exceedingly close ; and the scent of the flowers that were placed about in profusion was almost too sweet and overpowering.

“ And they say (the starry choir
And the other listening things)
That Israfeli’s fire
Is owing to that lyre,
By which he sits and sings,—
The trembling living wire
Of those unusual strings.”

How these verses haunted me ! With them floating in my mind, I played—losing myself in mazes of melody, and travelling harmoniously in and out of the different keys with that sense of perfect joy known only to those who can improvise

with ease, and catch the unwritten music of nature, which always appeals most strongly to emotions that are unspoilt by contact with the world, and which are quick to respond to what is purely instinctive art. I soon became thoroughly absorbed, and forgot that there were any persons present. In fancy I imagined myself again in view of the glory of the Electric Ring—again I seemed to behold the opaline radiance of the Central Sphere :

“ Where Love’s a grown-up God,
Where the Houri glances are
Imbued with all the beauty
Which we worship in a star.”

By-and-by I found my fingers at the work of tenderly unravelling a little skein of major melody, as soft and childlike as the innocent babble of a small brooklet flowing under ferns. I followed this airy suggestion obediently, till it led me of itself to its fitting end, when I ceased playing. I was greeted by a little burst of

applause, and looking up, saw that all the gentlemen had come in from the dining-room, and were standing near me. The stately figure of Heliobas was the most prominent in the group; he stood erect, one hand resting lightly on the framework of the piano, and his eyes met mine fixedly.

“You were inspired,” he said with a grave smile, addressing me; “you did not observe our entrance.”

I was about to reply, when a loud, appalling crash of thunder rattled above us, as if some huge building had suddenly fallen into ruins. It startled us all into silence for a moment, and we looked into each other's faces with a certain degree of awe.

“That was a good one,” remarked Mr. Challoner. “There was nothing undecided about that clap. Its mind was made up.”

Zara suddenly rose from her seat, and drew aside the window-curtains.

“I wonder if it is raining,” she said.

Amy Everard uttered a little shriek of dismay.

“Oh, don't open the blinds!” she exclaimed. “It is really dangerous!”

Heliobas glanced at her with a little sarcastic smile.

“Take a seat on the other side of the room, if you are alarmed, madame,” he said quietly, placing a chair in the position he suggested, which Amy accepted eagerly.

She would, I believe, have gladly taken refuge in the coal-cellar had he offered it. Zara, in the meantime, who had not heard Mrs. Everard's exclamation of fear, had drawn up one of the blinds, and stood silently looking out upon the night. Instinctively we all joined her, with the exception of Amy, and looked out also. The skies were very dark; a faint, moaning wind stirred the tops of the leafless trees; but there was no rain. A dry volcanic heat pervaded the atmosphere—in fact we felt the air so stifling, that Heli-

obas threw open the window altogether, saying, as he did so :

“ In a thunderstorm, it is safer to have the windows open than shut ; besides, one cannot suffocate.”

A brilliant glare of light flashed suddenly upon our vision. The heavens seemed torn open from end to end, and a broad lake of pale blue fire lay quivering in the heart of the mountainous black clouds—for a second only. An on-rushing, ever-increasing, rattling roar of thunder ensued, that seemed to shake the very earth, and all was again darkness.

“ This is magnificent !” cried Mrs. Chaloner, who, with her family, had travelled a great deal, and was quite accustomed to hurricanes and other inconveniences caused by the unaccommodating behaviour of the elements. “ I don’t think I ever saw anything like it ! John dear, even that storm we saw at Chamounix was not any better than this.”

“Well,” returned her husband meditatively, “you see we had the snow mountains there, and the effect was pretty lively. Then there were the echoes — those cavernous echoes were grand! What was that passage in Job, Effie, that I used to say they reminded me of?”

“‘The pillars of heaven tremble, and are astonished at His reproof . . . The thunder of His power, who can understand?’” replied Effie Challoner reverently.

“That’s it!” he replied. “I opine that Job was pretty correct in his ideas—don’t you, reverend sir?” turning to Father Paul.

The priest nodded, and held up his finger warningly.

“That lady—Mrs. Everard—is going to sing or play, I think,” he observed. “Shall we not keep silence?”

I looked towards Amy in some surprise. I knew she sang very prettily, but I had thought she was rendered too nervous by

the storm to do aught than sit quiet in her chair. However, there she was at the piano, and in another moment her fresh, sweet mezzo-soprano rang softly through the room in Tosti's plaintive song, "Good-bye!" We listened, but none of us moved from the open window where we still inhaled what air there was, and watched the lowering sky.

"Hush! a voice from the far-away,
'Listen and learn,' it seems to say;
'All the to-morrows shall be as to-day,'"

sang Amy with pathetic sweetness. Zara suddenly moved, as if oppressed, from her position among us as we stood clustered together, and stepped out through the French windows into the outside balcony, her head uncovered to the night.

"You will catch cold!" Mrs. Challoner and I both called to her simultaneously. She shook her head, smiling back at us; and, folding her arms lightly on the stone balus-

trade, leaned there and looked up at the clouds.

“The link must break, and the lamp must die ;
Good-bye to Hope ! Good-bye—good-bye !”

Amy's voice was a peculiarly thrilling one, and on this occasion sounded with more than its usual tenderness. What with her singing and the invisible presence of the storm, an utter silence possessed us—not one of us cared to move.

Heliobas once stepped to his sister's side in the open balcony, and said something, as I thought, to warn her against taking cold ; but it was a very brief whisper, and he almost immediately returned to his place amongst us. Zara looked very lovely out there ; the light coming from the interior of the room glistened softly on the sheen of her satin dress and its ornaments of pearls ; and the electric stone on her bosom shone faintly like a star on a rainy evening. Her beautiful face, turned upwards to the

angry sky, was half in light and half in shade; a smile parted her lips, and her eyes were bright with a look of interest and expectancy. Another sudden glare, and the clouds were again broken asunder; but this time in a jagged and hasty manner, as though a naked sword had been thrust through them and immediately withdrawn.

“That was a nasty flash,” said Colonel Everard, with an observant glance at the lovely Juliet-like figure on the balcony. “Mademoiselle, had you not better come in?”

“When it begins to rain I will come in,” she said, without changing her posture. “I hear the singing so well out here. Besides, I love the storm.”

A tumultuous crash of thunder, tremendous for its uproar and the length of time it was prolonged, made us look at each other again with anxious faces.

“What are we waiting for? Oh, my heart!

Kiss me straight on the brows and part!

Again! again, my heart, my heart!
What are we waiting for, you and I?
A pleading look—a stifled cry!
Good-bye for ever——”

Horror!—what was that? A lithe swift serpent of fire twisting venomously through the dark heavens? Zara raised her arms, looked up, smiled, and fell—senseless! With such appalling suddenness that we had scarcely recovered from the blinding terror of that forked lightning-flash, when we saw her lying prone before us on the balcony where one instant before she had stood erect and smiling! With exclamations of alarm and distress we lifted and bore her within the room, and laid her tenderly down upon the nearest sofa. At that moment a deafening, terrific thunder-clap—one only—as if a huge bombshell had burst in the air, shook the ground under our feet; and then, with a swish and swirl of long pent-up and suddenly-released wrath, down came the rain.

Amy's voice died away in a last "Good-bye!" and she rushed from the piano, with pale face and trembling lips, gasping out:

"What has happened? What is the matter?"

"She has been stunned by a lightning-flash," I said, trying to speak calmly, while I loosened Zara's dress and sprinkled her forehead with eau de Cologne from a scent-bottle Mrs. Challoner had handed to me. "She will recover in a few minutes."

But my limbs trembled under me, and tears, in spite of myself, forced their way into my eyes.

Heliobas meanwhile — his countenance white and set as a marble mask — shut the window fiercely, pulled down the blind and drew the heavy silken curtains close. He then approached his sister's senseless form, and, taking her wrist tenderly, felt for her pulse. We looked on in the deepest anxiety. The Challoner girls shivered with terror, and began to cry.

Mrs. Everard, with more self-possession, dipped a handkerchief in cold water and laid it on Zara's temples ; but no faint sigh parted the set yet smiling lips—no sign of life was visible. All this while the rain swept down in gusty torrents and rattled furiously against the window-panes ; while the wind, no longer a moan, had risen into a shriek, as of baffled yet vindictive anger. At last Heliobas spoke.

“ I should be glad of other medical skill than my own,” he said, in low and stifled accents. “ This may be a long fainting-fit.”

Mr. Challoner at once proffered his services.

“ I'll go for you anywhere you like,” he said cheerily ; “ and I think my wife and daughters had better come with me. Our carriage is sure to be in waiting. It will be necessary for the lady to have perfect quiet when she recovers, and visitors are best away. You need not be alarmed, I

am sure. By her colour it is evident she is only in a swoon. What doctor shall I send?"

Heliobas named one Dr. Morini, 10, Avenue de l'Alma.

"Right! He shall be here straight. Come, wife—come, girls! Mrs. Everard, we'll send back our carriage for you and the Colonel. Good-night! We'll call to-morrow and inquire after mademoiselle."

Heliobas gratefully pressed his hand as he withdrew, and his wife and daughters, with whispered farewells, followed him. We who were left behind all remained near Zara, doing everything we could think of to restore animation to that senseless form. Some of the servants, too, hearing what had happened, gathered in a little cluster at the drawing-room door, looking with pale and alarmed faces at the death-like figure of their beautiful mistress. Half an hour or more must have passed in this manner; within the room there was

a dreadful silence—but outside the rain poured down in torrents, and the savage wind howled and tore at the windows like a besieging army. Suddenly Amy Everard, who had been quietly and skilfully assisting me in rubbing Zara's hands and bathing her forehead, grew faint, staggered, and would have fallen had not her husband caught her on his arm.

"I am frightened," she gasped. "I cannot bear it—she looks so still, and she is growing—rigid, like a corpse! Oh, if she should be dead!" And she hid her face on her husband's breast.

At that moment we heard the grating of wheels on the gravel outside; it was the Challoners' carriage returned. The coachman, after depositing his master and family at the Grand Hotel, had driven rapidly back in the teeth of the stinging sleet and rain to bring the message that Dr. Morini would be with us as soon as possible.

"Then," whispered Colonel Everard

gently to me, "I'll take Amy home. She is thoroughly upset, and it's no use having her going off into hysterics. I'll call with Challoner to-morrow;" and with a kindly parting nod of encouragement to us all, he slipped softly out of the room, half leading, half carrying his trembling wife; and in a couple of minutes we heard the carriage again drive away.

Left alone at last with Heliobas and Father Paul, I, kneeling at the side of my darling Zara, looked into their faces for comfort, but found none. The dry-eyed despair on the countenance of Heliobas pierced me to the heart; the pitying, solemn expression of the venerable priest touched me as with icy cold. The lovely, marble-like whiteness and stillness of the figure before me filled me with a vague terror. Making a strong effort to control my voice, I called in a low, clear tone:

"Zara! Zara!"

No sign—not the faintest flicker of an

eyelash! Only the sound of the falling rain and the moaning wind—the thunder had long ago ceased. Suddenly a something attracted my gaze, which first surprised and then horrified me. The jewel—the electric stone on Zara's bosom no longer shone! It was like a piece of dull unpolished pebble. Grasping at the meaning of this, with overwhelming instinctive rapidity, I sprang up and caught the arm of Heliobas.

“You—you!” I whispered hurriedly. “*You* can restore her! Do as you did with Prince Ivan; you can—you must! That stone she wears—the light has gone out of it. If that means—and I am sure it does—that life has for a little while gone out of *her*, *you* can bring it back. Quick—quick! You have the power!”

He looked at me with burning grief-haunted eyes; and a sigh that was almost a groan escaped his lips.

“I have *no* power,” he said. “Not over

her. I told you she was dominated by a higher force than mine. What can *I* do? Nothing—worse than nothing—I am utterly helpless.”

I stared at him in a kind of desperate horror.

“Do you mean to tell me,” I said slowly, “that she is dead—utterly dead?”

He was about to answer, when one of the watching servants announced in a low tone: “Dr. Morini.”

The new-comer was a wiry, keen-eyed little Italian; his movements were quick, decisive, and all to the point of action. The first thing he did was to scatter the little group of servants right and left, and send them about their business. The next, to close the doors of the room against all intrusion. He then came straight up to Heliobas, and pressing his hand in a friendly manner, said briefly:

“How and when did this happen?”

Heliobas told him in as few words as

possible. Dr. Morini then bent over Zara's lifeless form, and examined her features attentively. He laid his ear against her heart and listened. Finally, he caught sight of the round, lustreless pebble hanging at her neck suspended by its strings of pearl. Very gently he moved this aside; looked, and beckoned us to come and look also. Exactly on the spot where the electric stone had rested, a small circular mark, like a black bruise, tainted the fair soft skin—a mark no larger than a small finger-ring.

“Death by electricity,” said Dr. Morini quietly. “Must have been instantaneous. The lightning-flash, or downward electric current, lodged itself here, where this mark is, and passed directly through the heart. Perfectly painless, but of course fatal. She has been dead some time.”

And, replacing the stone ornament in its former position, he stepped back with a suggestive glance at Father Paul. I

listened and saw—but I was in a state of stupefaction. Dead? My beautiful, gay, strong Zara *dead*? Impossible! I knelt beside her; I called her again and again by every endearing and tender name I could think of; I kissed her sweet lips. Oh, they were cold as ice, and chilled my blood! As one in a dream, I saw Heliobas advance; he kissed her forehead and mouth; he reverently unclasped the pearls from about her throat, and with them took off the electric stone. Then Father Paul stepped slowly forward, and in place of that once brilliant gem, now so dim and destitute of fire, he laid a crucifix upon the fair and gentle breast, motionless for ever.

At sight of this sacred symbol, some tense cord seemed to snap in my brain, and I cried out wildly:

“Oh, no, no! Not that! That is for the dead; Zara is not dead! It is all a mistake—a mistake; she will be quite well

presently ; and she will smile and tell you how foolish you were to think her dead ! Dead ? She cannot be dead ; it is impossible—quite impossible !” And I broke into a passion of sobs and tears.

Very gently and kindly Dr. Morini drew me away, and by dint of friendly persuasion, in which there was also a good deal of firm determination, led me into the hall, where he made me swallow a glass of wine. As I could not control my sobs, he spoke with some sternness :

“ Mademoiselle, you can do no good by giving way in this manner. Death is a very beautiful and solemn thing, and it is irreverent to show unseemly passion in such a great Presence. You loved your friend—let it be a comfort to you that she died painlessly. Control yourself, in order to assist in rendering her the last few gentle services necessary ; and try to console the desolate brother, who looks in real need of encouragement.”

These last words roused me. I forced back my tears, and dried my eyes.

“I will, Dr. Morini,” I said, in a trembling voice. “I am ashamed to be so weak. I know what I ought to do, and I will do it. You may trust me.”

He looked at me approvingly.

“That is well,” he said briefly. “And now, as I am of no use here, I will say good-night. Remember, excessive grief is mere selfishness; resignation is heroism.”

He was gone. I nerved myself to the task I had before me, and within an hour the fair casket of what had been Zara lay on an open bier in the little chapel, lights burning around it, and flowers strewn above it in mournful profusion.

We had left her body arrayed in its white satin garb; the cluster of orange-blossoms she had gathered still bloomed upon the cold breast, where the crucifix lay; but in the tresses of the long dark

hair I wove a wreath of lilies instead of the pearls we had undone.

And now I knelt beside the bier absorbed in thought. Some of the weeping servants had assembled, and knelt about in little groups. The tall candles on the altar were lit, and Father Paul, clad in mourning priestly vestments, prayed there in silence. The storm of rain and wind still raged without, and the windows of the chapel shook and rattled with the violence of the tempest.

A distant clock struck *One!* with a deep clang that echoed throughout the house. I shuddered. So short a time had elapsed since Zara had been alive and well; now, I could not bear to think that she was gone from me for ever. For ever, did I say? No, not for ever—not so long as love exists—love that shall bring us together again in that far-off Sphere where——

Hush! what was that? The sound of the organ? I looked around me in startled

wonderment. There was no one seated at the instrument; it was shut close. The lights on the altar and round the bier burnt steadily; the motionless figure of the priest before the tabernacle; the praying servants of the household—all was unchanged. But certainly a flood of music rolled grandly on the air—music that drowned for a moment the howling noise of the battering wind. I rose softly, and touched one of the kneeling domestics on the shoulder.

“Did you hear the organ?” I said.

The woman looked up at me with tearful, alarmed eyes.

“No, mademoiselle.”

I paused, listening. The music grew louder and louder, and surged round me in waves of melody. Evidently no one in the chapel heard it but myself. I looked about for Heliobas, but he had not entered. He was most probably in his study, whither he had retired to grieve in secret when we

had borne Zara's body to its present couch of dreamless sleep.

These sounds were meant for me alone then? I waited, and the music gradually died away; and as I resumed my kneeling position by the bier all was again silence, save for the unabated raging of the storm.

A strange calmness now fell on my spirits. Some invisible hand seemed to hold me still and tearless. Zara was dead. I realized it now. I began to consider that she must have known her fate beforehand. This was what she had meant when she said she was going on a journey. The more I thought of this the quieter I became, and I hid my face in my hands and prayed earnestly.

A touch roused me—an imperative, burning touch. An airy brightness, like a light cloud with sunshine falling through it, hovered above Zara's bier! I gazed breathlessly; I could not move my lips to utter a sound. A face looked at me—a

face angelically beautiful ! It smiled. I stretched out my hands ; I struggled for speech, and managed to whisper :

“ Zara, Zara ! you have come back ! ”

Her voice, so sweetly familiar, answered me :

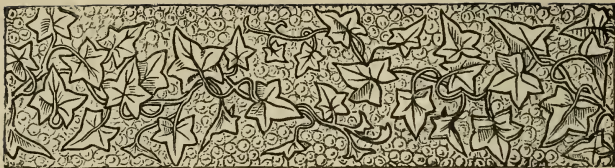
“ To life ? Ah, never, never again ! I am too happy to return. But save him—save my brother ! Go to him ; he is in danger ; to you is given the rescue. Save him ; and for me rejoice, and grieve no more ! ”

The face vanished, the brightness faded, and I sprang up from my knees in haste. For one instant I looked at the beautiful dead body of the friend I loved, with its set mouth and placid features, and then I smiled. This was not Zara—*she* was alive and happy ; this fair clay was but clay doomed to perish, but *she* was imperishable.

“ Save him—save my brother ! ” These words rang in my ears. I hesitated no

longer—I determined to seek Heliobas at once. Swiftly and noiselessly I slipped out of the chapel. As the door swung behind me I heard a sound that first made me stop in a sudden alarm, and then hurry on with increased eagerness. There was no mistaking it—it was the clash of steel!





CHAPTER VII.

A STRUGGLE FOR THE MASTERY.

IRUSHED to the study-door, tore aside the velvet hangings, and faced Heliobas and Prince Ivan Petroffsky. They held drawn weapons, which they lowered at my sudden entrance, and paused irresolutely.

“What are you doing?” I cried, addressing myself to Heliobas. “With the dead body of your sister in the house, you can *fight!* You, too!” and I looked reproachfully at Prince Ivan; “you also can desecrate the sanctity of death, and yet—you *loved* her!”

The Prince spoke not, but clenched his sword-hilt with a fiercer grasp, and glared wildly on his opponent. His eyes had a look of madness in them—his dress was much disordered—his hair wet with drops of rain—his face ghastly white, and his whole demeanour was that of a man distraught by grief and passion. But he uttered no word. Heliobas spoke; he was coldly calm, and balanced his sword lightly on his open hand as if it were a toy.

“This *gentleman*,” he said, with deliberate emphasis, “happened, on his way thither, to meet Dr. Morini, who informed him of the fatal catastrophe which has caused my sister’s death. Instead of respecting the sacredness of my solitude under the circumstances, he thrust himself rudely into my presence, and before I could address him, struck me violently in the face, and accused me of being my sister’s murderer. Such conduct can only meet with one reply. I gave him his choice of weapons: he chose

swords. Our combat has just begun—we are anxious to resume it ; therefore if you, mademoiselle, will have the goodness to retire——”

I interrupted him.

“I shall certainly not retire,” I said firmly. “This behaviour on both your parts is positive madness. Prince Ivan, please to listen to me. The circumstances of Zara’s death were plainly witnessed by me and others—her brother is as innocent of having caused it as I am.”

And I recounted to him quietly all that had happened during that fatal and eventful evening. He listened moodily, tracing out the pattern of the carpet with the point of his sword. When I had finished he looked up, and a bitter smile crossed his features.

“I wonder, mademoiselle,” he said, “that your residence in this accursed house has not taught you better. I quite believe all you say, that Zara, unfortunate

girl that she was, received her death by a lightning-flash. But answer me this : Who made her capable of attracting atmospheric electricity ? Who charged her beautiful delicate body with a vile compound of electrical fluid, so that she was as a living magnet, bound to draw towards herself electricity in all its forms ? Who tampered with her fine brain and made her imagine herself allied to a spirit of air ? Who but *he—he!*—yonder unscrupulous wretch!—he who, in the pursuit of his miserable science, practised his most dangerous experiments on his sister, regardless of her health, her happiness, her life ! I say he is her murderer—her remorseless murderer, and a thrice-damned villain !”

And he sprang forward to renew the combat. I stepped quietly, unflinchingly between him and Heliobas.

“Stop !” I exclaimed ; “this cannot go on. Zara herself forbids it !”

The Prince paused, and looked at me in a sort of stupefaction.

“Zara forbids it!” he muttered. “What do you mean?”

“I mean,” I went on, “that I have seen Zara since her death; I have spoken to her. She herself sent me here.”

Prince Ivan stared, and then burst into a fit of wild laughter.

“Little fool!” he cried to me; “he has maddened *you* too, then! You are also a victim! Miserable girl! out of my path! Revenge—revenge! while I am yet sane!”

Then pushing me roughly aside, he cast away his sword, and shouted to Heliobas:

“Hand to hand, villain! No more of these toy-weapons! Hand to hand!”

Heliobas instantly threw down his sword also, and rushing forward simultaneously, they closed together in savage conflict. Heliobas was the taller and more powerful of the two, but Prince Ivan seemed imbued

with the spirit of a hundred devils, and sprang at his opponent's throat with the silent, breathless ferocity of a tiger. At first Heliobas appeared to be simply on the defensive, and his agile, skilful movements were all used to parry and ward off the other's grappling eagerness. But as I watched the struggle, myself speechless and powerless, I saw his face change. Instead of its calm and almost indifferent expression, there came a look which was completely foreign to it—a look of savage determination bordering on positive cruelty. In a moment I saw what was taking place in his mind. The animal passions of the mere *man* were aroused—the spiritual force was utterly forgotten. The excitement of the contest was beginning to tell, and the desire of victory was dominant in the breast of him whose ideas were generally—and should have been now—those of patient endurance and large generosity. The fight grew closer, hotter, and more

terrible. Suddenly the Prince swerved aside and fell, and within a second Heliobas held him down, pressing one knee firmly against his chest. From my point of observation I noted with alarm that little by little Ivan ceased his violent efforts to rise, and that he kept his eyes fixed on the overshadowing face of his foe with an unnatural and curious pertinacity. I stepped forward. Heliobas pressed his whole weight heavily down on the young man's prostrate body, while with both hands he held him by the shoulders, and gazed with terrific meaning into his fast-paling countenance. Ivan's lips turned blue; his eyes appeared to start from their sockets; his throat rattled. The spell that held me silent was broken; a flash of light, a flood of memory swept over my intelligence. I knew that Heliobas was exciting the whole battery of his inner electric force, and that thus employed for the purposes of vengeance, it must infallibly cause death. I found my speech at last.

“Heliobas!” I cried. “Remember, remember Azùl! When death lies like a gift in your hand, withhold it! Withhold it, Heliobas; and give life instead!”

He started at the sound of my voice, and looked up. A strong shudder shook his frame. Very slowly, very reluctantly, he relaxed his position; he rose from his kneeling posture on the Prince’s breast—he left him, and stood upright. Ivan at the same moment heaved a deep sigh, and closed his eyes, apparently insensible.

Gradually one by one the hard lines faded out of the face of Heliobas, and his old expression of soft and grave beneficence came back to it as graciously as sunlight after rain. He turned to me, and bent his head in a sort of reverential salutation.

“I thank and bless you,” he said; “you reminded me in time. Another moment, and it would have been too late. You have saved me.”

“Give him his life,” I said, pointing to Ivan.

“He has it,” returned Heliobas; “I have not taken it from him, thank God! He provoked me; I regret it. I should have been more patient with him. He will revive immediately. I leave him to your care. In dealing with him, I ought to have remembered that human passion like his, unguided by spiritual knowledge, was to be met with pity and forbearance. As it is, however, he is safe. For me, I will go and pray for Zara’s pardon, and that of my wronged Azùl.”

As he uttered the last words, he started, looked up, and smiled.

“My beautiful one! Thou *hast* pardoned me? Thou wilt love me still? Thou art with me, Azùl, my beloved? I have not lost thee, oh my best and dearest! Wilt thou lead me? Whither? Nay — no matter whither—I come!”

And as one walking in sleep, he went

out of the room, and I heard his footsteps echoing in the distance on the way to the chapel.

Left alone with the Prince, I snatched a glass of cold water from the table, and sprinkled some of it on his forehead and hands. This was quite sufficient to revive him ; and he drew a long breath, opened his eyes, and stared wildly about him. Seeing no one but me, he grew bewildered, and asked :

“ What has happened ? ”

Then catching sight of the drawn swords lying still on the ground where they had been thrown, he sprang to his feet, and cried :

“ Where is the coward and murderer ? ”

I made him sit down and hear with patience what I had to say. I reminded him that Zara’s health and happiness had always been perfect, and that her brother would rather have slain himself than her. I told him plainly that Zara had expected

her death, and had prepared for it—had even bade me good-bye, although then I had not understood the meaning of her words. I recalled to his mind the day when Zara had used her power to repulse him.

“Disbelieve as you will in electric spiritual force,” I said. “Your message to her then through me was—*Tell her I have seen her lover.*”

At these words a sombre shadow flitted over the Prince’s face.

“I tell you,” he said slowly, “that I believe I was on that occasion the victim of an hallucination. But I will explain to you what I saw. A superb figure, like, and yet unlike, a man, but of a much larger and grander form, appeared to me, as I thought, and spoke. ‘Zara is mine,’ it said—‘mine by choice; mine by free-will; mine till death; mine after death; mine through eternity. With her thou hast naught in common; thy way lies else-

where. Follow the path allotted to thee, and presume no more upon an angel's patience.' Then this strange majestic-looking creature, whose face, as I remember it, was extraordinarily beautiful, and whose eyes were like self-luminous stars, vanished. But, after all, what of it? The whole thing was a dream."

"I am not so sure of that," I said quietly. "But, Prince Ivan, now that you are calmer and more capable of resignation, will you tell me *why* you loved Zara?"

"*Why!*" he broke out impetuously. "Why, because it was impossible to help loving her."

"That is no answer," I replied. "Think! You can reason well if you like—I have heard you hold your own in an argument. What made you love Zara?"

He looked at me in a sort of impatient surprise, but seeing I was very much in earnest, he pondered a minute or so before replying.

“She was the loveliest woman I have ever seen!” he said at last, and in his voice there was a sound of yearning and regret.

“Is *that* all?” I queried, with a gesture of contempt. “Because her body was beautiful—because she had sweet kissing lips and a soft skin; because her hand was like a white flower, and her dark hair clustering over her brow reminded one of a misty evening cloud hiding moonlight; because the glance of her glorious eyes made the blood leap through your veins and sting you with passionate desire—are these the reasons of your so-called love? Oh, give it some other and lower name! For the worms shall feed on the fair flesh that won your admiration—their wet and slimy bodies shall trail across the round white arms and tender bosom—unsightly things shall crawl among the tresses of the glossy hair; and nothing, nothing shall remain of what *you* loved, but dust. Prince Ivan, you shudder; but I too loved Zara

—I loved *her*, not the perishable casket in which, like a jewel, she was for a time enshrined. I love her still—and for the being I love there is no such thing as death.”

The Prince was silent, and seemed touched. I had spoken with real feeling, and tears of emotion stood in my eyes.

“I loved her as a man generally loves,” he said, after a little pause. “Nay—more than most men love most women!”

“Most men are too often selfish in both their loves and hatreds,” I returned. “Tell me if there was anything in Zara’s mind and intelligence to attract you? Did you sympathize in her pursuits; did you admire her tastes; had you any ideas in common with her?”

“No, I confess I had not,” he answered readily. “I considered her to be entirely a victim to her brother’s scientific experiments. I thought, by making her my wife, to release her from such tyranny and give her rescue and refuge. To this end, I

found out all I could from—*him*”—he approached the name of Heliobas with reluctance—“and I made up my mind that her delicate imagination had been morbidly excited; but that marriage and a life like that led by other women would bring her to a more healthy state of mind.”

I smiled with a little scorn.

“Your presumption was almost greater than your folly, Prince,” I said; “that with such ideas as these in your mind, you could dream of winning Zara for a wife. Do you think *she* could have led a life like that of other women? A frivolous round of gaiety, a few fine dresses and jewels, small-talk, society scandal, stale compliments—you think such things would have suited *her*? And would she have contented herself with a love like yours? Come! Come and see how well she has escaped you!”

And I beckoned him towards the door. He hesitated.

“Where would you take me?” he asked.

“To the chapel. Zara’s body lies there.”

He shuddered.

“No, no—not there! I cannot bear to look upon her perished loveliness—to see that face, once so animated, white and rigid—death in such a form is too horrible!”

And he covered his eyes with his hand—I saw tears slowly drop through his fingers. I gazed at him, half in wonder, half in pity.

“And yet you are a brave man!” I said.

These words roused him. He met my gaze with such a haggard look of woe that my heart ached for him. What comfort had he now? What joy could he ever expect? All his happiness was centred in the fact of *being alive*—alive to the pleasures of living, and to the joys the world could offer to a man who was strong, handsome, rich, and accomplished—how could he look upon death as otherwise than a

loathsome thing—a thing not to be thought of in the heyday of youthful blood and jollity—a doleful spectre, in whose bony hands the roses of love must fall and wither! With a sense of deep commiseration in me, I spoke again with great gentleness.

“You need not look upon Zara’s corpse unless you wish it, Prince,” I said. “To you, the mysteries of the Hereafter have not been unlocked, because there is something in your nature that cannot and will not believe in God. Therefore to you, death must be repellent. I know you are one of those for whom the present alone exists—you easily forget the past, and take no trouble for the future. Paris is your heaven, or St. Petersburg, or Vienna, as the fancy takes you; and the modern atheistical doctrines of French demoralization are in your blood. Nothing but a heaven-sent miracle could make you other than you are, and miracles do not exist for

the materialist. But let me say two words more before you go from this house. Seek no more to avenge yourself for your love-disappointment on Heliobas—for you have really nothing to avenge. By your own confession you only cared for Zara's body—that body was always perishable, and it has perished by a sudden but natural catastrophe. With her soul, you declare you had nothing in common—that was herself—and she is alive to us who love her as she sought to be loved. Heliobas is innocent of having slain her body; he but helped to cultivate and foster that beautiful Spirit which he knew to be *her*—for that he is to be honoured and commended. Promise me, therefore, Prince Ivan, that you will never approach him again except in friendship—indeed, you owe him an apology for your unjust accusation, as also your gratitude for his sparing your life in the recent struggle.”

The Prince kept his eyes steadily fixed

upon me all the time I was speaking, and as I finished, he sighed and moved restlessly.

‘Your words are compelling, mademoiselle,’ he said; ‘and you have a strange attraction for me. I know I am not wrong in thinking that you are a disciple of Heliobas, whose science I admit, though I doubt his theories. I promise you willingly what you ask—nay, I will even offer him my hand if he will accept it.’

Overjoyed at my success, I answered :

‘He is in the chapel, but I will fetch him here.’

Over the Prince’s face a shadow of doubt, mingled with dread, passed swiftly, and he seemed to be forming a resolve in his own mind which was more or less distasteful to him. Whatever the feeling was he conquered it by a strong effort, and said with firmness :

‘No; I will go to him myself. And I will look again upon—upon the face

I loved—it is but one pang the more, and why should I not endure it ?”

Seeing him thus inclined, I made no effort to dissuade him, and without another word I led the way to the chapel. I entered it reverently, he following me closely, with slow hushed footsteps. All was the same as I had left it, save that the servants of the household had gone to take some needful rest before the morning light called them to their daily routine of labour. Father Paul, too, had retired, and Heliobas alone knelt beside all that remained of Zara, his figure as motionless as though carved in bronze, his face hidden in his hands. As we approached, he neither stirred nor looked up, therefore I softly led the Prince to the opposite side of the bier, that he might look quietly on the perished loveliness that lay there at rest for ever. Ivan trembled, yet stedfastly gazed at the beautiful reposeful form, at the calm features on which the smile with which death had

been received, still lingered—at the folded hands, the fading orange-blossoms—at the crucifix that lay on the cold breast like the final seal on the letter of life. Impulsively he stooped forward, and with a tender awe pressed his lips on the pale forehead, but instantly started back with the smothered exclamation :

“ O God ! how cold ! ”

At the sound of his voice Heliobas rose up erect, and the two men faced each other, Zara's dead body lying like a barrier betwixt them.

A pause followed—a pause in which I heard my own heart beating loudly, so great was my anxiety. Heliobas suffered a few moments to elapse, then stretched his hand across his sister's bier.

“ In *her* name, let there be peace between us, Ivan,” he said in accents that were both gentle and solemn.

The Prince, touched to the quick, responded to these kindly words with eager

promptness, and they clasped hands over the quiet and lovely form that lay there—a silent binding witness of their reconciliation.

“I have to ask your pardon, Casimir,” then whispered Ivan. “I have also to thank you for my life.”

“Thank the friend who stands beside you,” returned Heliobas, in the same low tone, with a slight gesture towards me. “She reminded me of a duty in time. As for pardon, I know of no cause of offence on your part save what was perfectly excusable. Say no more; wisdom comes with years, and you are yet young.”

A long silence followed. We all remained looking wistfully down upon the body of our lost darling, in thought too deep for words or weeping. I then noticed that another humble mourner shared our watch—a mourner whose very existence I had nearly forgotten. It was the faithful

Leo. He lay couchant on the stone floor at the foot of the bier, almost as silent as a dog of marble ; the only sign of animation he gave being a deep sigh which broke from his honest heart now and then. I went to him and softly patted his shaggy coat. He looked up at me with big brown eyes full of tears, licked my hand meekly, and again laid his head down upon his two fore-paws with a resignation that was most pathetic.

The dawn began to peer faintly through the chapel windows—the dawn of a misty, chilly morning. The storm of the past night had left a sting in the air, and the rain still fell, though gently. The wind had almost entirely sunk into silence. I re-arranged the flowers that were strewn on Zara's corpse, taking away all those that had slightly faded. The orange-blossom was almost dead, but I left that where it was—where the living Zara had herself placed it. As I performed this slight

service, I thought, half mournfully, half gladly—

“Yes, Heaven is thine, but this
Is a world of sweets and sour—
Our flowers are merely *flowers* ;
And the shadow of thy perfect bliss
Is the sunshine of ours.”

Prince Ivan at last roused himself as from a deep and melancholy reverie, and, addressing himself to Heliobas, said softly:

“I will intrude no longer on your privacy, Casimir. Farewell! I shall leave Paris to-night.”

For all answer Heliobas beckoned him and me also out of the chapel. As soon as its doors closed behind us, and we stood in the centre hall, he spoke with affectionate and grave earnestness:

“Ivan, something tells me that you and I shall not meet again for many years, if ever. Therefore, when you say ‘*farewell*,’ the word falls upon my ears with double meaning. We are friends—our friendship

is sanctified by the dead presence of one whom we both loved, in different ways; therefore you will take in good part what I now say to you. You know, you cannot disguise from yourself that the science I study is fraught with terrible truth and marvellous discoveries; the theories I deduce from it you disbelieve, because you are *nearly* a materialist. I say *nearly*—not quite. That '*not quite*' makes me love you, Ivan: I would save the small bright spark that flickers within you from both escape and extinction. But I cannot—at least, not as yet. Still, in order that you may know that there is a power in me higher than ordinary human reason, before you go from me to-night hear my prophecy of your career. The world waits for you, Ivan—the world, all agape and glittering with a thousand sparkling toys; it waits, greedy for your presence, ready to fawn upon you for a smile, willing to cringe to you for a nod of approval. And why?

Because wealth is yours—vast, illimitable wealth. Aye—you need not start or look incredulous—you will find it as I say. You, whose fortune up to now has barely reached a poor four thousand per annum—you are at this moment the possessor of millions. This very night a relative of yours, whose name you scarcely know, has expired, leaving all his hoarded treasures to you. Before the close of this present day, on whose threshold we now stand, you will have the news. When you receive it remember me, and acknowledge that at least for once I knew and spoke the truth. Follow the broad road, Ivan, laid out before you—a road wide enough not only for you to walk in, but for the crowd of toadies and flatterers also, who will push on swiftly after you and jostle you on all sides; be strong of heart and merry of countenance! Gather the roses; press the luscious grapes into warm, red wine that, as you quaff it, shall make your blood dance a

mad waltz in your veins, and fair women's faces shall seem fairer to you than ever, their embraces more tender, their kisses more tempting! Spin the ball of Society like a toy on the palm of your hand! I see your life stretching before me like a brilliant, thread-like ephemeral ray of light! But in the far distance across it looms a shadow—a shadow that your power alone can never lift. Mark me, Ivan! When the first dread chill of that shadow makes itself felt, come to me—I shall yet be living. Come; for then no wealth can aid you—at that dark hour no boon companions can comfort. Come; and by our friendship so lately sworn—by Zara's pure soul—by God's existence, I will not die till I have changed that darkness over you into light eternal!—Fare you well!"

He caught the Prince's hand, and wrung it hard; then, without further word, look, or gesture, turned and disappeared again within the chapel.

His words had evidently made a deep impression on the young nobleman, who gazed after his retreating figure with a certain awe not unmingled with fear.

I held out my hand in silent farewell. Ivan took it gently, and kissed it with graceful courtesy.

"Casimir told me that your intercession saved my life, mademoiselle," he said. "Accept my poor thanks. If his present prophet-like utterances be true——"

"Why should you doubt him?" I asked, with some impatience. "Can you believe in *nothing*?"

The Prince, still holding my hand, looked at me in a sort of grave perplexity.

"I think you have hit it," he observed quietly. "I doubt everything except the fact of my own existence, and there are times when I am not even sure of that. But if, as I said before, the prophecy of my Chaldean friend, whom I cannot help admiring with all my heart, turns out to be

correct, then my life is more valuable to me than ever with such wealth to balance it, and I thank you doubly for having saved it by a word in time."

I withdrew my hand gently from his.

"You think the worth of your life increased by wealth?" I asked.

"Naturally! Money is power."

"And what of the shadow also foretold as inseparable from your fate?"

A faint smile crossed his features.

"Ah, pardon me! That is the only portion of Casimir's fortune-telling that I am inclined to disbelieve thoroughly."

"But," I said, "if you are willing to accept the pleasant part of his prophecy, why not admit the possibility of the unpleasant occurring also?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"In these enlightened times, mademoiselle, we only believe what is agreeable to us, and what suits our own wishes, tastes, and opinions. *Ça va sans dire*. We cannot

be forced to accept a Deity against our reason. That is a grand result of modern education."

"Is it?" and I looked at him with pity. "Poor human reason! It will reel into madness sometimes for a mere trifle—an overdose of alcohol will sometimes upset it altogether—what a noble omnipotent thing is human reason! But let me not detain you. Good-bye, and—as the greeting of olden times used to run—God save you!"

He bent his head with a light reverence.

"I believe you to be a good, sweet woman," he said, "therefore I am grateful for your blessing. My mother," and here his eyes grew dreamy and wistful—"poor soul! she died long ago—my mother would never let me retire to rest without signing the cross on my brow. Ah well, that is past! I should like, mademoiselle," and his voice sank very low, "to send some flowers for—her—you understand?"

I did understand, and readily promised

to lay whatever blossoms he selected tenderly above the sacred remains of that earthly beauty he had loved, as he himself said, "more than most men love most women."

He thanked me earnestly, and seemed relieved and satisfied. Casting a look of farewell around the familiar hall, he wafted a parting kiss towards the chapel—an action which, though light, was full of tenderness and regret. Then, with a low salute, he left me. The street-door opened and closed after him in its usual noiseless manner. He was gone.

The morning had now fairly dawned, and within the Hôtel Mars the work of the great mansion went on in its usual routine; but a sombre melancholy was in the atmosphere—a melancholy that not all my best efforts could dissipate. The domestics looked sullen and heavy-eyed; the only ones in their number who preserved their usual equanimity were the Armenian men-

servants and the little Greek page. Preparations for Zara's funeral went on apace; they were exceedingly simple, and the ceremony was to be quite private in character. Heliobas issued his orders, and saw to the carrying out of his most minute instruction in his usual calm manner; but his eyes looked heavy, and his fine countenance was rendered even more majestic by the sacred, resigned sorrow that lay upon it like a deep shadow. His page served him with breakfast in his private room; but he left the light meal untasted. One of the women brought me coffee; but the very thought of eating and drinking seemed repulsive, and I could not touch anything. My mind was busy with the consideration of the duty I had to perform—namely, to see the destruction of Zara's colossal statue, as she had requested. After thinking about it for some time, I went to Heliobas and told him what I had it in charge to do. He listened attentively.

“Do it at once,” he said decisively. “Take two of my Armenians; they are discreet, obedient, and they ask no questions—with strong hammers they will soon pulverize the clay. Stay! I will come with you.” Then looking at me scrutinizingly, he added kindly: “You have eaten nothing, my child? You cannot? But your strength will give way—here, take this.” And he held out a small glass of a fluid whose re-vivifying properties I well knew to be greater than any sustenance provided by an ordinary meal. I swallowed it obediently, and as I returned the empty glass to him he said: “I also have a commission in charge from Zara. You know, I suppose, that she was prepared for her death?”

“I did not know; but I think she must have been,” I answered.

“She was. We both were. We remained together in the chapel all day, saying what parting words we had to say

to one another. We knew her death, or rather her release, was to occur at some hour that night; but in what way the end was destined to come, we knew not. Till I heard the first peals of thunder, I was in suspense; but after that I was no longer uncertain. You were a witness of the whole ensuing scene. No death could have been more painless than hers. But let me not forget the message she gave me for you." Here he took from a secret drawer the electric stone Zara had always worn. "This jewel is yours," he said. "You need not fear to accept it—it contains no harm; it will bring you no ill-fortune. You see how all the sparkling brilliancy has gone out of it? Wear it, and within a few minutes it will be as lustrous as ever. The life throbbing in your veins warms the electricity contained in it; and with the flowing of your blood, its hues change and glow. It has no power to attract; it can simply absorb and shine. Take it as

a remembrance of her who loved you and who loves you still.”

I was still in my evening dress, and my neck was bare. I slipped the chain, on which hung the stone, round my throat, and watched the strange gem with some curiosity. In a few seconds a pale streak of fiery topaz flashed through it, which deepened and glowed into a warm crimson, like the heart of a red rose; and by the time it had become thoroughly warmed against my flesh, it glittered as brilliantly as ever.

“I will always wear it,” I said earnestly. “I believe it will bring me good fortune.”

“I believe it will,” returned Heliobas simply. “And now let us fulfil Zara’s other commands.”

On our way across the hall, we were stopped by the page, who brought us a message of inquiry after Zara’s health from Colonel Everard and his wife, and also from the Challoners. Heliobas hastily

wrote a few brief words in pencil, explaining the fatal result of the accident, and returned it to the messenger, giving orders at the same time that all the blinds should be pulled down at the windows of the house, that visitors might understand there was no admittance. We then proceeded to the studio, accompanied by two of the Armenians carrying heavy hammers. Reverently, and with my mind full of recollections of Zara's living presence, I opened the familiar door. The first thing that greeted us was a most exquisitely wrought statue in white marble of Zara herself, full length, and arrayed in her customary graceful Eastern costume. The head was slightly raised; a look of gladness lighted up the beautiful features; and within the loosely clasped hands was a cluster of roses. Round the pedestal were carved the words, "Omnia vincit Amor," with Zara's name and the dates of her birth and death. A little slip of paper lay

at the foot of the statue, which Heliobas perceived, and taking it, he read and passed it to me. The lines were in Zara's handwriting, and ran as follows :

“To my beloved Casimir—my brother, my friend, my guide and teacher, to whom I owe the supreme happiness of my life in this world and the next—let this poor figure of his grateful Zara be a memento of happy days that are gone, only to be renewed with redoubled happiness hereafter.”

I handed back the paper silently, with tears in my eyes, and we turned our attention to the colossal figure we had come to destroy. It stood at the extreme end of the studio, and was entirely hidden by white linen drapery. Heliobas advanced, and by a sudden dexterous movement succeeded in drawing off the coverings with a single effort, and then we both fell back

and gazed at the clay form disclosed in amazement. What did it represent? A man? a god? an angel? or all three united in one vast figure?

It was an unfinished work. The features of the face were undeclared, save the brow and eyes; and these were large, grand, and full of absolute wisdom and tranquil consciousness of power. I could have gazed on this wonderful piece of Zara's handiwork for hours, but Heliobas called to the Armenian servants, who stood near the door awaiting orders, and commanded them to break it down. For once these well-trained domestics showed signs of surprise, and hesitated. Their master frowned. Snatching a hammer from one of them, he himself attacked the great statue as if it were a foe, and a cloud of dust began to fill the studio. The Armenians, seeing he was in earnest, returned to their usual habits of passive obedience, and aided him in his labour. Within a few minutes the

great and beautiful figure lay in fragments on the floor, and these fragments were soon crushed into indistinguishable dust. I had promised to witness this work of destruction, and witness it I did, but it was with pain and regret. When all was finished, Heliobas commanded his servants to carry the statue of Zara's self down to his own private room, and then to summon all the domestics of the household in a body to the great hall, as he wished to address them. I heard him give this order with some surprise, and he saw it. As the Armenians slowly disappeared, carrying with great care the marble figure of their late mistress, he turned to me, as he locked up the door of the studio, and said quietly :

“ These ignorant folk, who serve me for money and food—money that they have eagerly taken, and food that they have greedily devoured—they think that I am the devil or one of the devil's agents, and I

am going to prove their theories entirely to their satisfaction. Come and see !”

I followed him, somewhat mystified. On the way downstairs he said :

“ Do you know why Zara wished that statue destroyed ?”

“ No,” I said frankly ; “ unless for the reason that it was incomplete.”

“ It always would have been incomplete,” returned Heliobas ; “ even had she lived to work at it for years. It was a daring attempt, and a fruitless one. She was trying to make a clay figure of one who never wore earthly form—the Being who is her Twin-Soul, who dominates her entirely, and who is with her now. As well might she have tried to represent in white marble the prismatic hues of the rainbow !”

We had now reached the hall, and the servants were assembling by twos and threes. They glanced at their master with looks of awe, as he took up a commanding

position near the fountain, and faced them with a glance of calm scrutiny and attention. I drew a chair behind one of the marble columns and seated myself, watching everything with interest. Leo appeared from some corner or other, and laid his rough body down close at his master's feet.

In a few minutes all the domestics, some twenty in number, were present, and Heliobas, raising his voice, spoke with a clear deliberate enunciation :

“ I have sent for you all this morning, because I am perfectly aware that you have all determined to give me notice.”

A stir of astonishment and dismay ensued on the part of the small audience, and I heard one voice near me whisper :

“ He *is* the devil, or how could he have known it ?”

The lips of Heliobas curled in a fine sarcastic smile. He went on :

“ I spare you this trouble. Knowing

your intentions, I take upon myself to dismiss you at once. Naturally, you cannot risk your characters by remaining in the service of the devil. For my own part, I wonder the devil's money has not burnt your hands, or his food turned to poison in your mouths. My sister, your kind and ever-indulgent mistress, is dead. You know this, and it is your opinion that I summoned up the thunderstorm which caused her death. Be it so. Report it so, if you will, through Paris ; your words do not affect me. You have been excellent machines, and for your services many thanks ! As soon as my sister's funeral is over, your wages, with an additional present, will be sent to you. You can then leave my house when you please ; and, contrary to the usual custom of accepted devils, I am able to say, without perishing in the effort—God speed you all !”

The faces of those he addressed exhibited various emotions while he spoke—

fear contending with a good deal of shame. The little Greek page stepped forward timidly.

“The master knows that I will never leave him,” he murmured, and his large eyes were moist with tears.

Heliobas laid a gentle hand on the boy’s dark curls, but said nothing. One of the four Armenians advanced, and with a graceful rapid gesture of his right hand, touched his head and breast.

“My lord will not surely dismiss *us* who desire to devote ourselves to his service? We are willing to follow my lord to the death, if need be, for the sake of the love and honour we bear him.”

Heliobas looked at him very kindly.

“I am richer in friends than I thought myself to be,” he said quietly. “Stay then, by all means, Afra, you and your companions, since you have desired it. And you, my boy,” he went on, addressing the tearful page, “think you that I would

turn adrift an orphan, whom a dying mother trusted to my care? Nay, child, I am as much your servant as you are mine, so long as your love turns towards me."

For all answer the page kissed his hand in a sort of rapture, and flinging back his clustering hair from his classic brows, surveyed the domestics who had taken their dismissal in silent acquiescence, with a pretty scorn.

"Go, all of you, scum of Paris!" he cried in his clear treble tones—"you who know neither God nor devil! You will have your money—more than your share—what else seek you? You have served one of the noblest of men; and because he is so great and wise and true, you judge him a fiend! Oh, so like the people of Paris—they who pervert all things till they think good evil and evil good! Look you! you have worked for your wages; but I have worked for *him*—I would starve

with him, I would die for him! For to me he is not fiend, but Angel!"

Overcome by his own feelings the boy again kissed his master's hand, and Heliobas gently bade him be silent. He himself looked round on the still motionless group of servants with an air of calm surprise.

"What are you waiting for?" he asked. "Consider yourselves dismissed, and at liberty to go where you please. Any one of you that chooses to apply to me for a character shall not lack the suitable recommendation. There is no more to say."

A lively-looking woman with quick restless black eyes stepped forward.

"I am sure," she said, with a mincing curtsey, "that we are very sorry if we have unintentionally wronged monsieur; but monsieur, who is aware of so many things, must know that many reports are circulated about monsieur that make one to shudder; that madame his sister's death

so lamentable has given to all, what one would say, the horrors; and monsieur must consider that poor servants of virtuous reputation——”

“So, Jeanne Claudet!” interrupted Heliobas, in a thrilling low tone. “And what of the child—the little waxen-faced helpless babe left to die on the banks of the Loire? But it did not die, Jeanne—it was rescued; and it shall yet live to loathe its mother!”

The woman uttered a shriek, and fainted.

In the feminine confusion and fuss that ensued, Heliobas, accompanied by his little page and the dog Leo, left the hall and entered his own private room, where for some time I left him undisturbed.

In the early part of the afternoon a note was brought to me. It was from Colonel Everard, entreating me to come as soon as possible to his wife, who was very ill.

“Since she heard of the death of that beautiful young lady, a death so fearfully

sudden and unexpected," wrote the Colonel, "she has been quite unlike herself—nervous, hysterical, and thoroughly unstrung. It will be a real kindness to her if you will come as soon as you can—she has such a strong desire for your company."

I showed this note at once to Heliobas. He read it, and said :

"Of course you must go. Wait till our simple funeral ceremony is over, and then—we part. Not for ever ; I shall see you often again. For now I have lost Zara, you are my only female disciple, and I shall not willingly lose sight of you. You will correspond with me ?"

"Gladly and gratefully," I replied.

"You shall not lose by it. I can initiate you into many secrets that will be useful to you in your career. As for your friend Mrs. Everard, you will find that your presence will cure her. You have progressed greatly in electric force ; the mere

touch of your hand will soothe her, as you will find. But never be tempted to try any of the fluids of which you have the recipes on her, or on anybody but yourself, unless you write to me first about it, as Cellini did when he tried an experiment on you. As for your own bodily and spiritual health, you know thoroughly what to do—*keep the secret*; and make a step in advance every day. By-and-by you will have double work.”

“How so?” I asked.

“In Zara’s case, her soul became dominated by a Spirit whose destiny was fulfilled and perfect, and who never could descend to imprisonment in earthly clay. Now, you will not be dominated—you will be simply *equalized*; that is, you will find the exact counterpart of your own soul dwelling also in human form, and you will have to impart your own force to that other soul, which will, in its turn, impart to yours a corresponding electric impetus.

There is no union so lovely as such an one—no harmony so exquisite; it is like a perfect chord, complete and indissoluble. There are sevenths and ninths in music, beautiful and effective in their degrees; but perhaps none of them are so absolutely satisfying to the ear as the perfect chord. And this is your lot in life and in love, my child—be grateful for it night and morning on your bended knees before the Giver of all good. And walk warily—your own soul with that other shall need much high thought and humble prayer. Aim onward and upward—you know the road—you also know, and you have partly seen, what awaits you at the end.”

After this conversation we spoke no more in private together. The rest of the afternoon was entirely occupied with the final preparations for Zara’s funeral, which was to take place at Père-la-Chaise early in the next morning. A large and beautiful wreath of white roses, lilies, and maiden-

hair arrived from Prince Ivan; and, remembering my promise to him, I went myself to lay it in a conspicuous place on Zara's corpse. That fair body was now laid in its coffin of polished oak, and a delicate veil of filmy lace draped it from head to foot. The placid expression of the features remained unchanged, save for a little extra rigidity of the flesh; the hands, folded over the crucifix, were stiff, and looked as though they were moulded in wax. I placed the wreath in position and paused, looking wistfully at that still and solemn figure. Father Paul, slowly entering from a side-door, came and stood beside me.

“She is happy,” he said; and a cheerful expression irradiated his venerable features.

“Did you also know she would die that night?” I asked softly.

“Her brother sent for me, and told me of her expected dissolution. She herself

told me, and made her last confession and communion. Therefore I was prepared."

"But did you not doubt—were you not inclined to think they might be wrong?" I inquired, with some astonishment.

"I knew Heliobas as a child," the priest returned. "I knew his father and mother before him; and I have been always perfectly aware of the immense extent of his knowledge, and the value of his discoveries. If I were inclined to be sceptical on spiritual matters, I should not be of the race I am; for I am also a Chaldean."

I said no more, and Father Paul trimmed the tapers burning round the coffin in devout silence. Again I looked at the fair dead form before me; but somehow I could not feel sad again. All my impulses bade me rejoice. Why should I be unhappy on Zara's account?—more especially when the glories of the Central Sphere were yet fresh in my memory, and when I knew as a positive fact that her happiness

was now perfect. I left the chapel with a light step and lighter heart, and went to my own room to pack up my things that all might be in readiness for my departure on the morrow. On my table I found a volume whose quaint binding I at once recognised—"The Letters of a Dead Musician." A card lay beside it, on which was written in pencil :

"Knowing of your wish to possess this book, I herewith offer it for your acceptance. It teaches you a cheerful devotion to Art, and an indifference to the world's opinions—both of which are necessary to you in your career.—HELIOBAS."

Delighted with this gift, I opened the book, and found my name written on the fly-leaf, with the date of the month and year, and the words :

"La musica è il lamento dell' amore o la preghiera a gli Dei." (Music is the lament of love, or a prayer to the Gods.)

I placed this treasure carefully in a corner of my portmanteau, together with the parchment scrolls containing "The Electric Principle of Christianity," and the valuable recipes of Heliobas ; and as I did so, I caught sight of myself in the long mirror that directly faced me. I was fascinated, not by my own reflection, but by the glitter of the electric gem I wore. It flashed and glowed like a star, and was really lovely—far more brilliant than the most brilliant cluster of fine diamonds. I may here remark that I have been asked many questions concerning this curious ornament whenever I have worn it in public, and the general impression has been that it is some new arrangement of electric light such as is manufactured for the hair-pins and other ornaments recently seen at Truefitt's in Bond Street. It is, however, nothing of the kind ; it is simply a clear pebble, common enough on the shores of tropical countries which has the pro-

perty of absorbing a small portion of the electricity in a human body, sufficient to make it shine with prismatic and powerful lustre—a property which has only as yet been discovered by Heliobas, who asserts that the same capability exists in many other apparently lustreless stones which have been untried, and are therefore unknown. The “healing stones,” or amulets, still in use in the East, and also in the remote parts of the Highlands (see notes to Archibald Clerk’s translation of *Ossian*), are also electric, but in a different way—they have the property of absorbing *disease* and destroying it in certain cases; and these, after being worn a suitable length of time, naturally exhaust what virtue they originally possessed, and are no longer of any use. Stone amulets are considered nowadays as a mere superstition of the vulgar and uneducated; but it must be remembered that superstition itself has always had for its foundation

some grain, however small and remote, of fact. I could give a very curious explanation of the formation of *orchids*, those strange plants called sometimes "Freaks of Nature," as if Nature ever indulged in a "freak" of any kind! But I have neither time nor space to enter upon the subject now; indeed, if I were once to begin to describe the wonderful, amazing and beautiful vistas of knowledge that the wise Chaldean, who is still my friend and guide, has opened up and continues to extend before my admiring vision, a work of twenty volumes would scarce contain all I should have to say. But I have written this book merely to tell those who peruse it, about Heliobas, and what I myself experienced in his house; beyond this I may not go. For, as I observed in my introduction, I am perfectly aware that few, if any, of my readers will accept my narrative as more than a mere visionary romance—or that they will admit the

mysteries of life, death, eternity, and all the wonders of the Universe to be simply the *natural and scientific outcome of a Ring of Everlasting Electricity*; but whether they agree to it or no, I can say with Galileo, "*E pur si muove!*"





CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

IT was a very simple and quiet procession that moved next day from the Hôtel Mars to Père-la-Chaise. Zara's coffin was carried in an open hearse, and was covered with a pall of rich white velvet on which lay a royal profusion of flowers—Ivan's wreath, and a magnificent cross of lilies sent by tender-hearted Mrs. Challoner, being most conspicuous among them. The only thing a little unusual about it was that the funeral car was drawn by two stately *white* horses ; and Heliobas told me this had been ordered

at Zara's special request, as she thought the solemn pacing through the streets of dismal black steeds had a depressing effect on the passers-by.

"And why," she had said, "should anybody be sad, when *I* in reality am so thoroughly happy?"

Prince Ivan Petroffsky had left Paris, but his carriage, drawn by two prancing Russian horses, followed the hearse at a respectful distance, as also the carriages of Dr. Morini, and some other private persons known to Heliobas. A few people attended it on foot, and these were chiefly from among the very poor, some of whom had benefited by Zara's charity or her brother's medical skill, and had heard of the calamity through rumour, or through the columns of the *Figaro*, where it was reported with graphic brevity. The weather was still misty, and the fiery sun seemed to shine through tears as Father Paul, with his assistants, read in solemn

yet cheerful tones the service for the dead according to the Catholic ritual. One of the chief mourners at the grave was the faithful Leo ; who, without obtruding himself in anyone's way, sat at a little distance, and seemed, by the confiding look with which he turned his eyes upon his master, to thoroughly understand that he must henceforth devote his life entirely to him. The coffin was lowered, the "Requiem æternam" spoken—all was over. Those assembled shook hands quietly with Heliobas, saluted each other, and gradually dispersed. I entered a carriage and drove back to the Hôtel Mars, leaving Heliobas in the cemetery to give his final instructions for the ornamentation and decoration of his sister's grave.

The little page served me with some luncheon in my own apartment, and by the time all was ready for my departure, Heliobas returned. I went down to him in his study, and found him sitting pen-

sively in his armchair, absorbed in thought. He looked sad and solitary, and my whole heart went out to him in gratitude and sympathy. I knelt beside him as a daughter might have done, and softly kissed his hand. He started as though awakened suddenly from sleep, and seeing me, his eyes softened, and he smiled gravely.

“Are you come to say ‘Good-bye,’ my child?” he asked, in a kind tone. “Well, your mission here is ended.”

“Had I any mission at all,” I replied, with a grateful look, “save the very selfish one which was comprised in the natural desire to be restored to health?”

Heliobas surveyed me for a few moments in silence.

“Were I to tell you,” he said at last, “by what mystical authority and influence you were compelled to come here, by what a marvellously linked chain of circumstances you became known to me long

before I saw you ; how I was made aware that you were the only woman living to whose companionship I could trust my sister at a time when the society of one of her own sex became absolutely necessary to her ; how you were marked out to me as a small point of light by which possibly I might steer my course clear of the darkness which threatened me—I say, were I to tell you all this, you would no longer doubt the urgent need of your presence here. It is, however, enough to tell you that you have fulfilled all that was expected of you, even beyond my best hopes ; and in return for your services, the worth of which you cannot realize, whatever guidance I can give you in the future for your physical and spiritual life, is yours. I have done something for you, but not much—I will do more. Only, in communicating with me, I ask you to honour me with your full confidence in all matters pertaining to yourself and your surround-

ings—then I shall not be liable to errors of judgment in the opinions I form or the advice I give.”

“I promise most readily,” I replied gladly, for it seemed to me that I was rich in possessing as a friend and counsellor such a man as this student of the loftiest sciences.

“And now, one thing more,” he resumed, opening a drawer in the table near which he sat. “Here is a pencil for you to write your letters to me with. It will last about ten years, and at the expiration of that time you can have another. Write with it on any paper, and the marks will be like those of an ordinary drawing-pencil; but as fast as they are written they disappear. Trouble not about this circumstance—write all you have to say, and when you have finished your letter your closely covered pages shall seem blank. Therefore, were the eye of a stranger to look at them, nothing could be learned therefrom.

But when they reach me, I can make the writing appear and stand out on these apparently unsullied pages as distinctly as though your words had been printed. My letters to you will also, when you receive them, appear blank; but you will only have to press them for about ten minutes in this"—and he handed what looked like an ordinary blotting-book—"and they will be perfectly legible. Cellini has these little writing implements; he uses them whenever the distances are too great for us to amuse ourselves with the sagacity of Leo—in fact, the journeys of that faithful animal have principally been to keep him in training."

"But," I said, as I took the little pencil and book from his hand, "why do you not make these convenient writing materials public property? They would be so useful."

"Why should I build up a fortune for some needy stationer?" he asked, with a

half-smile. "Besides, they are not new things. They were known to the ancients, and many secret letters, laws, histories, and poems were written with instruments such as these. In an old library, destroyed more than two centuries ago, there was a goodly pile of apparently blank parchment. Had I lived then and known what I know now, I could have made the white pages declare their mystery."

"Has this also to do with electricity?" I asked.

"Certainly—with what is called vegetable electricity. There is not a plant or herb in existence, but has almost a miracle hidden away in its tiny cup or spreading leaves—do you doubt it?"

"Not I!" I answered quickly. "I doubt nothing."

Heliobas smiled gravely.

"You are right!" he said. "Doubt is the destroyer of beauty—the poison in the sweet cup of existence—the curse which

mankind have brought on themselves. Avoid it as you would the plague. Believe in anything or everything miraculous and glorious—the utmost reach of your faith can with difficulty grasp the majestic reality and perfection of everything you can see, desire, or imagine. Mistrust that volatile thing called Human Reason, which is merely a name for whatever opinion we happen to adopt for the time—it is a thing which totters on its throne in a fit of rage or despair—there is nothing infinite about it. Guide yourself by the delicate Spiritual Instinct within you, which tells you that with God all things are possible, save that He cannot destroy Himself or lessen by one spark the fiery brilliancy of His ever-widening circle of productive Intelligence. But make no attempt to convert the world to your way of thinking—it would be mere waste of time.”

“May I never try to instruct anyone in these things?” I asked.

“You can try, if you choose ; but you will find most human beings like the herd of swine in the Gospel, possessed by devils that drive them headlong into the sea. *You* know, for instance, that angels and aërial spirits actually exist ; but were you to assert your belief in them, philosophers (so-called) would scout your theories as absurd, though their idea of a *lonely* God, who yet is Love, is the very acme of absurdity. For Love *must* have somewhat to love, and *must* create the beauty and happiness round itself and the things beloved. But why point out these simple things to those who have no desire to see ? Be content, child, that *you* have been deemed worthy of instruction—it is a higher fate for you than if you had been made a Queen.”

The little page now entered, and told me that the carriage was at the door in waiting. As he disappeared again after delivering this message, Heliobas rose

from his chair, and taking my two hands in his, pressed them kindly.

“One word more, little friend, on the subject of your career. I think the time will come when you will feel that music is almost too sacred a thing to be given away for money to a careless and promiscuous public. However this may be, remember that scarce one of the self-styled ‘*artists*’ who cater for the crowd deserves to be called *musician* in the highest sense of the word. Most of them seek not music, but money and applause; and therefore the art they profess is degraded by them into a mere trade. But you, when you play in public, must forget that *persons* with little vanities and lesser opinions exist. Think of what you saw in your journey with Azùl; and by a strong effort of your will, you can, if you choose, *compel* certain harmonies to sound in your ears—fragments of what is common breathing air to the Children of the Ring, some of whom you saw—and

you will be able to reproduce them in part, if not in entirety. But if you once admit a thought of *self* to enter your brain, those aërial sounds will be silenced instantly. By this means, too, you can judge who are the true disciples of Music in this world—those who, like Schubert and Chopin, suffered the heaven-born melodies to descend *through* them as though they were mere *conductors* of sound; or those who, feebly imitating other composers, measure out crotchets and quavers by rule and line, and flood the world with inane and perishable, and therefore useless, productions. And now,—farewell !”

“Do you remain in Paris ?” I asked.

“For a few days only. I shall go to Egypt, and in travelling accustom myself to the solitude in which I must dwell, now Zara has left me.”

“You have Azùl,” I ventured to remark.

“Ah ! but how often do I see her ? Only when my soul for an instant is clear

from all earthly and gross obstruction ; and how seldom I can attain to this result while weighted with my body ! But she is near me—*that* I know—faithful as the star to the mariner's compass !”

He raised his head as he spoke, and his eyes flashed. Never had I seen him look more noble or kingly. The inspired radiance of his face softened down into his usual expression of gentleness and courtesy, and he said, offering me his arm :

“ Let me see you to the carriage. You know, it is not an actual parting with us—I intend that we shall meet frequently. For instance, the next time we exchange pleasant greetings will be in Italy.”

I suppose I looked surprised ; I certainly felt so, for nothing was further from my thoughts than a visit to Italy.

Heliobas smiled, and said in a tone that was almost gay :

“ Shall I draw the picture for you ? I see a fair city, deep embowered in hills

and sheltered by olive-groves. Over it beams a broad sky, deeply blue ; many soft bells caress the summer air. Away in the Cascine Woods a gay, party of people are seated on the velvety moss ; they have mandolines, and they sing for pure gaiety of heart. One of them, a woman with fair hair, arrayed in white, with a red rose at her bosom, is gathering the wild flowers that bloom around her, and weaving them into posies for her companions. A stranger, pacing slowly, book in hand, through the shady avenue, sees her—her eyes meet his. She springs up to greet him ; he takes her hand. The woman is yourself ; the stranger no other than your poor friend, who now, for a brief space, takes leave of you !”

So rapidly had he drawn up this picture, that the impression made on me was as though a sudden vision had been shown to me in a magic glass. I looked at him earnestly.

“Then our next meeting will be happy?” I said inquiringly.

“Of course. Why not? And the next—and the next after that also!” he answered.

At this reply, so frankly given, I was relieved, and accompanied him readily through the hall towards the street-door. Leo met us here, and intimated, as plainly as a human being could have done, his wish to bid me good-bye. I stooped and kissed his broad head and patted him affectionately, and was rewarded for these attentions by seeing his plume-like tail wave slowly to and fro—a sign of pleasure the poor animal had not betrayed since Zara’s departure from the scene of her earthly imprisonment.

At the door the pretty Greek boy handed me a huge basket of the loveliest flowers.

“The last from the conservatory,” said Heliobas. “I shall need no more of these luxuries.”

As I entered the carriage he placed the flowers beside me, and again took my hand.

“Good-bye, my child!” he said, in earnest and kindly tones. “I have your address, and will write you all my movements. In any trouble, small or great, of your own, send to me for advice without hesitation. I can tell you already that I foresee the time when you will resign altogether the precarious and unsatisfactory life of a mere professional musician. You think no other career would be possible to you. Well, you will see. A few months will decide all. Good-bye again; God bless you!”

The carriage moved off, and Heliobas stood on the steps of his mansion watching it out of sight. To the last I saw his stately figure erect in the light of the winter sunshine—a figure destined from henceforth to occupy a prominent position in my life and memory. The regret I felt

at parting from him was greatly mitigated by the assurance he gave me of our future meeting, a promise which has since been fulfilled, and is likely soon to be fulfilled again. That I have such a friend is an advantageous circumstance for me, for through his guidance I am able to judge accurately of many things occurring in the course of the daily life around me—things which, seemingly trivial, are the hints of serious results to come, which I am thus permitted in part to foresee. There is a drawback, of course, and the one bitter drop in the cup of knowledge is, that the more I progress under the tuition of Heliobas, the less am I deceived by graceful appearances. I perceive with almost cruel suddenness the true characters of all those whom I meet. No smile of lip or eye can delude me into accepting mere surface-matter for real depth, and it is intensely painful for me to be forced to behold hypocrisy in the expression of

the apparently devout—sensuality in the face of some radiantly beautiful and popular woman—vice under the mask of virtue—self-interest in the guise of friendship, and spite and malice springing up like a poisonous undergrowth beneath the words of elegant flattery or dainty compliment. I often wish I could throw a rose-coloured mist of illusion over all these things, and still more earnestly do I wish I could in a single instance find myself mistaken. But alas! the fatal finger of the electric instinct within me points out unerringly the flaw in every human diamond, and writes “*Sham*” across many a cunningly contrived imitation of intelligence and goodness. Still, the grief I feel at this is counterbalanced in part by the joy with which I quickly recognise real virtue, real nobility, real love; and when these attributes flash out upon me from the faces of human beings, my own soul warms, and I know I have seen a

vision as of angels. The capability of Heliobas to foretell future events proved itself in his knowledge of the fate of the famous English hero, Gordon, long before that brave soldier met his doom. At the time the English Government sent him out on his last fatal mission, a letter from Heliobas to me contained the following passage :

“ I see Gordon has chosen his destiny and the manner of his death. Two ways of dying have been offered him—one that is slow, painful and inglorious ; the other sudden, and therefore sweeter to a man of his temperament. He himself is perfectly aware of the approaching end of his career ; he will receive his release at Khartoum. England will lament over him for a little while, and then he will be declared an inspired madman who rushed recklessly on his own doom ; while those who allowed him to be slain will be voted

the wisest, the most just and virtuous in the realm."

This prophecy was carried out to the letter, as I fully believe certain things of which I am now informed will also be carried out. But though there are persons who pin their faith on "Zadkiel," I doubt if there are any who will believe in such a thing as *electric divination*. The one is mere vulgar imposture, the other is performed on a purely scientific basis in accordance with certain existing rules and principles; yet I think there can be no question as to which of the two the public *en masse* is likely to prefer. On the whole, people do not mind being humbugged; they hate being instructed, and the trouble of thinking for themselves is almost too much for them. Therefore "Zadkiel" is certain to flourish for many and many a long day, while the lightning instinct of prophecy dormant in every

human being remains unused and utterly forgotten except by the rare few.

* * * * *

I have little more to say. I feel that those among my readers who idly turn over these pages, expecting to find a “*novel*” in the true acceptation of the term, may be disappointed. My narrative is simply an “experience;” but I have no wish to persuade others of the central truth contained in it—namely, *the existence of powerful electric organs in every human being, which with proper cultivation are capable of marvellous spiritual force.* The time is not yet ripe for this fact to be accepted.

The persons connected with this story may be dismissed in a few words. When I joined my friend Mrs. Everard, she was suffering from nervous hysteria. My presence had the soothing effect Heliobas had assured me of, and in a very few

days we started from Paris in company for England. She, with her amiable and accomplished husband, went back to the States a few months since to claim an immense fortune, which they are now enjoying as most Americans enjoy wealth. Amy has diamonds to her heart's content, and toilettes *galore* from Worth's ; but she has no children, and from the tone of her letters to me, I fancy she would part with one at least of her valuable necklaces to have a small pair of chubby arms round her neck, and a soft little head nestling against her bosom.

Raffaello Cellini still lives and works ; his paintings are among the marvels of modern Italy for their richness and warmth of colour—colour which, in spite of his envious detractors, is destined to last through ages. He is not very rich, for he is one of those who give away their substance to the poor and the distressed ; but where he is known he is universally

beloved. None of his pictures have yet been exhibited in England, and he is in no hurry to call upon the London critics for their judgment. He has been asked several times to sell his large picture, "Lords of our Life and Death," but he will not. I have never met him since our intercourse at Cannes, but I hear of him frequently through Heliobas, who has recently forwarded me a proof engraving of the picture "L'Improvisatrice," for which I sat as model. It is a beautiful work of art, but that it is like *me* I am not vain enough to admit. I keep it, not as a portrait of myself, but as a souvenir of the man through whose introduction I gained the best friend I have.

News of Prince Ivan Petroffsky reaches me frequently. He is the possessor of the immense wealth foretold by Heliobas; the eyes of Society greedily follow his movements; his name figures conspicuously in the "Fashionable Intelligence;"

and the magnificence of his recent marriage festivities was for some time the talk of the Continent. He has married the only daughter of a French Duke--a lovely creature, as soulless and heartless as a dressmaker's stuffed model; but she carries his jewels well on her white bosom, and receives his guests with as much dignity as a well-trained major-domo. These qualities suffice to satisfy her husband *at present*; how long his satisfaction will last is another matter. He has not quite forgotten Zara; for on every recurring *Jour des Morts*, or Feast of the Dead, he sends a garland or cross of flowers to the simple grave in Père-la-Chaise. Heliobas watches his career with untiring vigilance; nor can I myself avoid taking a certain interest in the progress of his fate. At the moment I write he is one of the most envied and popular noblemen in all the Royal Courts of Europe; and no one thinks of asking him whether he is happy.

He *must* be happy, says the world; he has everything that is needed to make him so. Everything? yes—all except one thing, for which he will long when the shadow of the end draws near.

And now what else remains? A brief farewell to those who have perused this narrative, or a lingering parting word?

In these days of haste and scramble, when there is no time for faith, is there time for sentiment? I think not. And therefore there shall be none between my readers and me, save this—a friendly warning. Belief—belief in God—belief in all things noble, unworldly, lofty, and beautiful, is rapidly being crushed underfoot by—what? By mere lust of gain! Be sure, good people, be very sure that you are *right* in denying God for the sake of man—in abjuring the spiritual for the material—before you rush recklessly onward. The end for all of you can be but death; and are you quite positive after all that there is *no*

Hereafter? Is it sense to imagine that the immense machinery of the Universe has been set in motion for nothing? Is it even common reason to consider that the Soul of Man, with all its high musings, its dreams of unseen glory, its longings after the Infinite, is a mere useless vapour, or a set of shifting molecules in a perishable brain? The mere fact of *the existence of a desire* clearly indicates an *equally existing capacity* for the *gratification* of that desire; therefore, I ask, would the *wish* for a future state of being, which is secretly felt by every one of us, have been permitted to find a place in our natures, *if there were no possible means of granting it?* Why all this discontent with the present—why all this universal complaint and despair and world-weariness, if there be *no hereafter?* For my own part, I have told you frankly *what I have seen* and *what I know*; but I do not ask you to believe me. I only say, IF—*if* you admit to yourselves the possibility of a

future and eternal state of existence, would it not be well for you to inquire seriously how you are preparing for it in these wild days? Look at society around you, and ask yourselves: Whither is our "*Progress*" tending—Forward or Backward—Upward or Downward? Which way? Fight the problem out. Do not glance at it casually, or put it away as an unpleasant thought, or a consideration involving too much trouble—struggle with it bravely till you resolve it, and whatever the answer may be, *abide by it*. If it leads you to deny God and the immortal destinies of your own souls, and you find hereafter, when it is too late, that both God and immortality exist, you have only yourselves to blame. We are the arbiters of our own fate, and that fact is the most important one of our lives. Our *will* is positively unfettered; it is a rudder put freely into our hands, and with it we can steer *wherever we choose*. God will not *compel* our love or obedience. We must

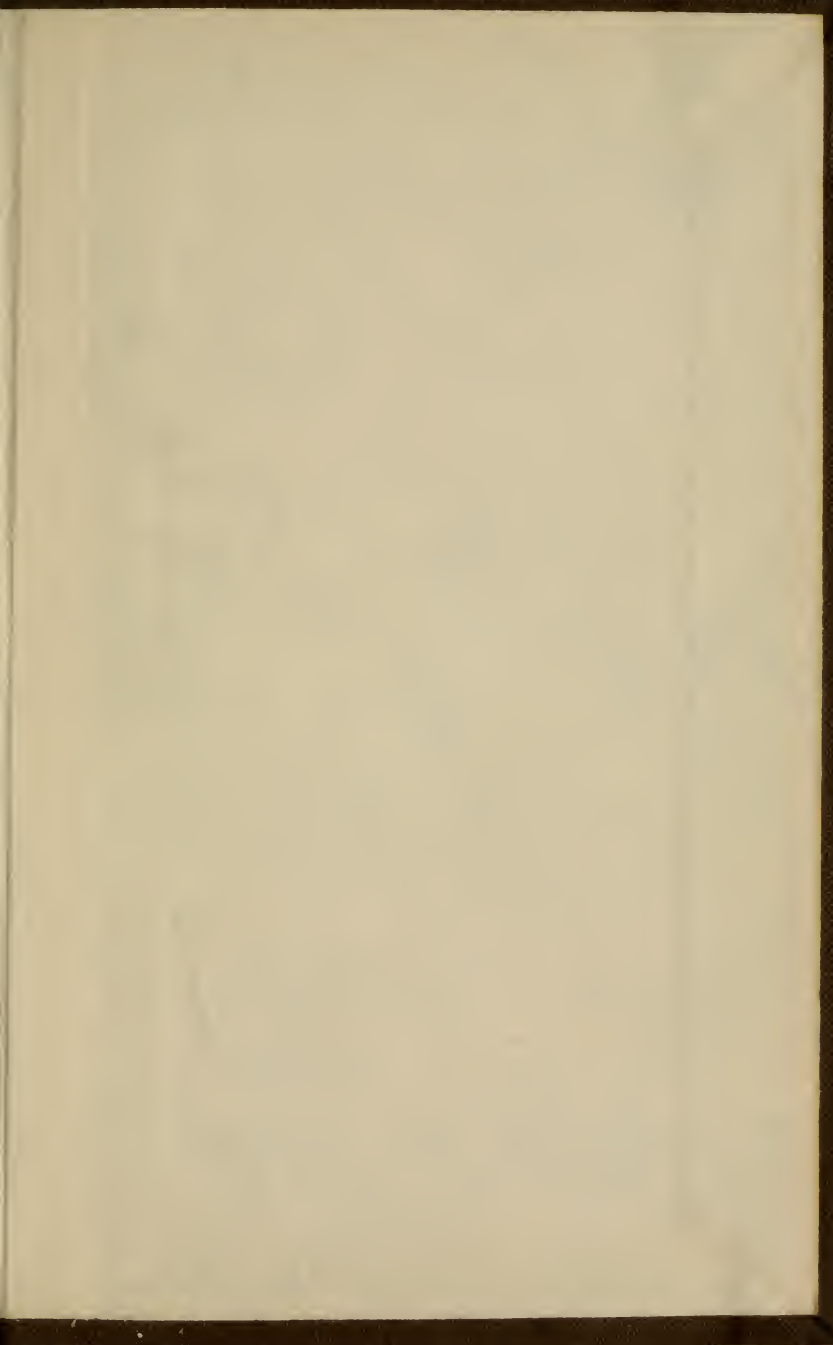
ourselves *desire* to love and obey—*desire it above all things in the world.*

As for the Electric Origin of the Universe, a time is coming when scientific men will acknowledge it to be the only theory of Creation worthy of acceptance. All the wonders of Nature are the result of *light and heat alone*—*i.e.*, are the work of the Electric Ring I have endeavoured to describe, which *must* go on producing, absorbing, and reproducing worlds, suns, and systems for ever and ever. The Ring, in its turn, is merely the outcome of God's own personality—the atmosphere surrounding the World in which He has His existence—a World created by love and for love alone. I cannot force this theory on public attention, which is at present claimed by various learned professors, who give ingenious explanations of “atoms” and “molecules;” yet, even regarding these same “atoms,” the mild question may be put: Where did the *first* “atom” come

from? Some may answer: "We call the first atom *God*." Surely it is as well to call Him a Spirit of pure Light as an Atom? However, the fact of one person's being convinced of a truth will not, I am aware, go very far to convince others. I have related my "experience" exactly as it happened at the time, and my readers can accept or deny the theories of Heliobas as they please. Neither denial, acceptance, criticism, nor incredulity can affect *me* personally, inasmuch as I am not Heliobas, but simply the narrator of an episode connected with him; and as such, my task is finished.

THE END.





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